

## NAIVE AND SENTIMENTAL POETRY

[ON THE NAIVE (*Die Horen*, No. 11, 1795)]

(161) There are moments in our lives when we dedicate a kind of love and tender respect to nature in plants, minerals, animals, and landscapes, as well as to human nature in children, in the customs of country folk, and to the primitive world, not because it gratifies our senses, nor yet because it satisfies our understanding or taste (the very opposite can occur in both instances), rather, simply *because it is nature*. Every person of a finer cast who is not totally lacking in feeling experiences this when he wanders in the open air, when he stays in the country, or lingers before the monuments of ancient times; in short, whenever he is surprised in the midst of artificial circumstances and situations by the sight of simple nature. It is this interest, not infrequently elevated into a need, which underlies much of our fondness for flowers and animals, for simple gardens, for strolls, for the country and its inhabitants, for many an artifact of remote antiquity, and the like; provided that neither affectation nor any other fortuitous interest play a role. However, this kind of interest in nature can take place only under two conditions. First, it is absolutely necessary that the object which inspires it should be *nature* or at least be taken by us as such; <sup>1</sup> second, that it be *naive* (in the broadest meaning of



the word), i.e., that nature stand in contrast to art and put it to shame. As soon as the latter (162) is joined with the former, not before, nature becomes naive.

Nature, considered in this wise, is for us nothing but the voluntary presence, the subsistence of things on their own, their existence in accordance with their own immutable laws.

This representation is absolutely necessary if we are to take an interest in such appearances. If one were able by the most consummate deception to give an artificial flower the similitude of nature, if one were able to induce the highest illusion by imitation of the naive in folk-customs, the discovery that it was imitation would completely destroy the feeling of which we spoke.\* From this it is clear that this kind of satisfaction in nature is not aesthetic but moral; for it is mediated by an idea, not produced immediately by observation; nor is it in any way dependent upon beauty of form. For what could a modest flower, a stream, a mossy stone, the chirping of birds, the humming of bees, etc., possess in themselves so pleasing to us? What could give them a claim even upon our love? It is not these objects, it is an idea represented

\* Kant, who was the first, as far as I know, who began to reflect purposefully upon this phenomenon, remarks that if we were to hear the song of the nightingale imitated with the utmost deception by a human voice and had abandoned ourselves to the impression with all our feelings, our entire delight would disappear with the destruction of the illusion. See the chapter on the intellectual interest in the beautiful in the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*. Anyone who has learned to admire the author only as a great thinker will be pleased here to come upon a trace of his heart and be convinced by this discovery of the man's high philosophical calling (which absolutely requires the combination of both characteristics).



by them which we love in them. We love in them the tacitly creative life (163), the serene spontaneity of their activity, existence in accordance with their own laws, the inner necessity, the eternal unity with themselves.

*They are what we were; they are what we should once again become.* We were nature just as they, and our culture, by means of reason and freedom, should lead us back to nature.<sup>2</sup> They are, therefore, not only the representation of our lost childhood, which eternally remains most dear to us, but fill us with a certain melancholy. But they are also representations of our highest fulfilment in the ideal, thus evoking in us a sublime tenderness.

Yet their perfection is not to their credit, because it is not the product of their choice. They accord us then, the quite unique delight of being our example without putting us to shame. They surround us like a continuous divine phenomenon, but more exhilarating than blinding. What determines their character is precisely what is lacking for the perfection of our own; what distinguishes us from them, is precisely what they themselves lack for divinity. We are free, they are necessary; we change, they remain a unity. But only if both are joined one with the other—if the will freely obeys the law of necessity, and reason asserts its rule through all the flux of imagination, does the ideal or the divine come to the fore. *In them*, then, we see eternally that which escapes us, but for which we are challenged to strive, and which, even if we never attain to it, we may still hope to approach in endless progress. *In ourselves* we observe an advantage which they lack, and in which they can either never participate at all (as in the case of the irra-



tional) or only insofar as they proceed by *our* path (as with childhood). They afford us, therefore, the sweetest enjoyment of our humanity as idea, even though they must perforce humiliate us with reference to any particular condition of our humanity.

(164) Since this interest in nature is based upon an idea, it can manifest itself only in minds which are receptive to ideas, i.e., in moral minds. By far the majority of people merely affect this state, and the universality of this sentimental taste in our times as expressed, particularly since the appearance of certain writings,<sup>3</sup> in the form of sentimental journeys, pleasure gardens, walks, and other delights of this sort, is by no means a proof of the universality of this mode of feeling. Yet nature will always have something of this effect even upon the most unfeeling, if only because that tendency toward the moral common to all men is sufficient for the purpose, and we are all without distinction, regardless of the distance between our actions and the simplicity and truth of nature, impelled to it in idea. Particularly powerfully and most universally this sensitivity to nature is given expression at the instance of such objects as stand in close connection with us, affording a retrospective view of ourselves and revealing more closely the unnatural in us, as, for example, in children and childlike folk. One is in error to suppose that it is only the notion of helplessness which overcomes us with tenderness at certain moments when we are together with children. That may perhaps be the case with those who in the presence of weakness are accustomed only to feeling their own superiority. But the feeling of which I speak (it occurs only in specifically moral moods and is not to be confused with the emotion that is excited in us



by the happy activity of children) is humiliating rather than favorable to self-love; and even if an advantage were to be drawn from it, this would certainly not be on our side. We are touched not because we look down upon the child from the height of our strength and perfection, but rather because we *look upward* from the *limitation* of our condition, which is inseparable from the *determination* which we have attained, to the unlimited *determinacy*<sup>4</sup> (165) of the child and to its pure innocence; and our emotion at such a moment is too transparently mixed with a certain melancholy for its source to be mistaken. In the child *disposition* and *determination* are represented; in us that *fulfilment* that forever remains far short of those. The child is therefore a lively representation to us of the ideal, not indeed as it is fulfilled, but as it is enjoined; hence we are in no sense moved by the notion of its poverty and limitation, but rather by the opposite: the notion of its pure and free strength, its integrity, its eternality. To a moral and sensitive person a child will be a *sacred* object on this account; an object, in fact, which by the greatness of an idea destroys all empirical greatness; one which, whatever else it may lose in the judgment of the understanding, it regains in ample measure in the judgment of reason.

It is from just this contradiction between the judgment of reason and the understanding that the quite extraordinary phenomenon arises of those mixed feelings which the *naive* mode of thought excites in us. It connects *childlike* simplicity with the *childish*; through the latter it exposes its weakness to the understanding and causes that smile by which we betray our (*theoretical*) superiority. But as soon as we have cause to



believe that childish simplicity is at the same time childlike, that in consequence not lack of understanding, not incapacity, but rather a higher (*practical*<sup>5</sup>) strength, a heart full of innocence and truth, is the source of that which out of its inner greatness scorns the aid of art, then that triumph of the understanding is set aside, and mockery of ingenuousness yields to admiration of simplicity. We feel ourselves obliged to respect the object at which we formerly smiled, and since we at the same time cast our glance upon ourselves, bemoan the fact that we are not likewise endowed. Thus arises (166) the entirely unique phenomenon of a feeling in which joyous mockery, respect, and melancholy are compounded.\*

\* In a note appended to the Analytic of the Sublime (*Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*, p. 225, 1st edition) Kant likewise distinguishes these threefold ingredients in the feeling of the naive, but he supplies another explanation. "Something compounded of both (the animal feeling of pleasure and the spiritual feeling of respect) is found in naivety, which is the bursting forth of that sincerity originally natural to mankind in opposition to the art of dissimulation that has become second nature. We laugh at a simplicity that does not yet understand how to conceal itself, yet we are delighted at the simplicity of nature which here thwarts that art. We expected some routine mode of utterance, artificial and carefully contrived to make a fine impression, and yet we see unspoiled innocent nature which we no more expected to see than he who displayed it intended it to be exposed. That the fair but false impression which ordinarily weighs so much in our judgment is now suddenly transformed into nothing—that the scoundrel in us, as it were, is revealed—sets the mind in motion in two opposed directions one after the other, giving the body a salutary shock. A mixture of solemnity and high esteem appears in this play of the faculty of judgment, because something infinitely superior to all conventional manners, namely, purity of thought (or at least an inclination thereto) is, after all, not wholly extinguished in human nature. But since it appears only fleetingly



To be naive it is necessary that (167) nature be victorious over art,\* whether this occur counter to the knowledge or will of the individual or with his full awareness. In the first case this is the naive of *surprise* and amuses us; in the second, it is the naive *temperament* and touches us.

With the naive of surprise the individual must be

\* Perhaps I should say quite briefly: *truth victorious over deceit*; but the concept of the naive seems to me still more inclusive, since any form of simplicity that triumphs over artifice, and natural freedom over stiffness and constraint, excites a similar emotion in us.

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and the art of dissimulation swiftly draws a veil before it, there is at the same time an admixture of regret, which is an emotion of tenderness; an emotion which, taken as a joke, is very easily combined with good-humored laughter (and in fact is usually so combined), and which simultaneously compensates for the embarrassment of whoever gave rise to the occasion for not yet being experienced in the ways of men."—I confess that this mode of explanation does not entirely satisfy me, and this principally because it asserts of the naive as a whole what is at most true only of a species of it, the (167) naive of surprise, of which I shall speak later. It certainly arouses laughter if somebody exposes himself by naivety, and in some cases this laughter may derive from a preceding expectation that fails to materialize. But even naivety of the noblest sort, the naive of temperament, arouses a smile always, which however is scarcely due to any expectation that comes to nothing, but that can only be explained by the contrast between certain behavior and the conventionally accepted and expected forms. I doubt also whether the regret which is mingled in our feeling about the latter kind of naivety refers to the naive person and not rather to ourselves or to humanity at large, whose decay we are reminded of in such cases. It is too clearly a moral regret which must have some nobler object than the physical ills by which sincerity is threatened in the ordinary course of things, and this object can hardly be any other than the loss of truth and simplicity in mankind.



*morally* capable of denying nature; with the naive temperament this may not be the case, but we must not be able to think him *physically* incapable of doing so if it is to affect us as being naive. The actions and speech of children thus give us a pure impression of the naive only so long as we do not recall their incapacity for art and in any case only (168) take into consideration the contrast between their naturalness and the artificiality in ourselves. The naive is *child-likeness where it is no longer expected*, and precisely on this account cannot be ascribed to actual childhood in the most rigorous sense.

But in both cases, in the naive of surprise just as in the naive of temperament, nature must be in the right where art is in the wrong.

Only by this last provision is the concept of the naive completed. The affect<sup>6</sup> is also nature, and the rule of propriety is something artificial; yet the victory of the affect over propriety is anything but naive. If, on the other hand, the same affect should triumph over artifice, over false modesty, over deceit, then we do not hesitate to call it naive.\* Hence it is necessary

\* A child is badly behaved if, out of greediness, foolhardiness, or impetuosity, it acts in opposition to the prescripts of a good education, but it is naive if its free and healthy nature rids it of the mannerisms of an irrational education, such as the awkward posturings of the dancing master. The same occurs with the naive in its wholly figurative meaning, when it is transferred from the human to the inanimate. Nobody would find naive the spectacle of a badly tended garden in which the weeds have the upper hand, but there is certainly something naive when the free growth of spreading branches undoes the painstaking work of the topiarist in a French garden. Likewise, it is in no way naive if a trained horse performs its lessons badly out of natural stupidity, but something of the naive is present if it forgets them out of natural freedom.



that nature should triumph over art not by her blind violence as *dynamic greatness*, but by her form as *moral greatness*, in brief, not as *compulsion*, but as *inner necessity*. It is not the inadequacy of art but its invalidity that must have assured the victory of nature; for inadequacy is (169) a shortcoming, and nothing that derives from a shortcoming can inspire respect. It is indeed the case with the naive of surprise that the superior power of the affect and a lack of awareness reveal nature; but this lack and the superior power by no means constitute the naive, rather they simply provide the opportunity for nature to obey unimpeded her moral character, i.e., the law of harmony.

The naive of surprise can apply only to a human being, and then only insofar as in this moment he is no longer pure and innocent nature. It presupposes a will that is not in harmony with nature's own acts. Such a person, when brought to awareness, will take fright at himself; the naive *temperament*, on the other hand, will marvel at people and at their astonishment. But since, in the naive of surprise, the truth is revealed not by the personal and moral character, but by the natural character as revealed through the affect, we cannot attribute any merit to the individual for his sincerity, and our laughter is mockery deserved, which will not be restrained by any personal esteem for the individual. But since even in this case it is the sincerity of nature that breaks through the veil of falsity, a satisfaction of a higher order will be joined with the malicious joy at having caught somebody out; for nature in contrast with deceit must always engender respect. We therefore experience a truly moral pleas-



ure even at the expense of the naive of surprise, although not at the expense of moral character.\*

(170) In the naive of surprise we do indeed always respect nature because we are obliged to respect truth; in the naive of temperament, on the other hand, we respect the person and hence enjoy not only a moral pleasure but a moral object. In both cases nature is in the *right* in that it speaks truth; but in the latter case not only is nature in the right, but the individual also possesses *honor*. In the first case the sincerity of nature accrues to the shame of the individual because it is involuntary; in the second it always accrues to his credit, provided of course that whatever he said would otherwise have put him to shame.

We ascribe a naive temperament to a person if he, in his judgment of things, overlooks their artificial and contrived aspects and heeds only their simple nature. We demand of him whatever can be judged about things within healthy nature, and absolutely ignore whatever presupposes any detachment from nature

\* Since the naive depends solely on the manner in which something is said or done, this characteristic disappears from view as soon as the matter itself assumes a predominant (170) or even contradictory impression either by its causes or its effects. Naivety of this kind can even disclose a crime, but then we have neither the calm nor the time to direct our attention to the form of the disclosure, and revulsion at the personal character swallows up our pleasure in the natural character. Just as our outraged feelings deprive us of moral delight in the sincerity of nature when we discover a crime as a result of naivety, so also the compassion excited destroys our malicious joy when we witness someone endangered by his naivety.

[Translator's note: the references to disclosure of a crime appear to anticipate Schiller's poem of 1797, *Die Kraniche des Ibykus*, in which a pair of murderers betray themselves because they see in the cranes flying overhead an omen of the pursuing Furies.]



whether due to thought or feeling, or if at all affected by them.

If a father tells his child that some man or other is expiring from poverty, and the child goes and gives the poor man his father's purse, such an action is naive; for healthy nature is acting through the child, and in a world in which (171) healthy nature were predominant he would be entirely right to act so. He sees only the distress and the means nearest at hand to alleviate it; such a development of property rights as permits a portion of humanity to perish has no basis in simple nature. The child's act, therefore, puts the world to shame, and this our hearts also confess by the satisfaction they derive from such an act.

If a man without knowledge of the world, but otherwise sound of understanding, tells his secrets to another who is deceiving him, but who is able skillfully to conceal his motives and so, by his own sincerity, lends the other the means with which to harm him, this we find naive. We laugh at him, yet we cannot refrain from esteeming him. For his trust in the other man springs from the uprightness of his own temperament; at least he is naive only insofar as this is the case.<sup>7</sup>

The naive mode of thought can therefore never be a characteristic of depraved men, rather it can be attributed only to children and to those of a childlike temperament. These latter often act and think naively in the midst of the artificial circumstances of fashionable society; they forget in their own beautiful humanity that they have to do with a depraved world, and comport themselves even at the courts of kings with the same ingenuousness and innocence that one would find only in a pastoral society.



It is, incidentally, not at all easy to distinguish always between childish and childlike innocence, since there are actions which hover on the extreme boundary between both, and where we are left absolutely in doubt whether we should laugh at their simplemindedness or esteem their simplicity. There is a very remarkable example of this type in the history of the reign of Pope Hadrian VI<sup>8</sup> which has been described for us by Herr Schröckh with his customary punctiliousness and factual accuracy. This (1522) Pope, a Dutchman by birth, occupied the Holy See at one of the most critical times for the hierarchy, when an embittered faction was exposing the shortcomings of the Roman Church without mercy, and the opposing faction was interested in the highest degree in concealing them. What the truly naive character, if indeed such a one should ever stray upon the seat of St. Peter, should have done in this case, is not the question; rather, it is how far such naivety of temperament might be compatible with the role of the Pope. This it was, however, that placed the predecessors and successors of Hadrian in the extremest embarrassment. They uniformly followed the established Roman system of making no admissions whatever. But Hadrian truly possessed the upright character of his nation and the innocence of his former station. From the narrow sphere of the scholar he was translated to his supreme position, and even upon the heights of his new office had not become untrue to that simple character. The abuses in the Church disturbed him, and he was far too straightforward to dissimulate publicly what he privately admitted to himself. In accordance with this manner of thinking he allowed himself in the instructions he sent with his legate to Germany to be betrayed into admissions



which had never been heard of from any Pope, and which ran directly counter to the principles of this Court. "We well know," they read in part, "that for many years much that is abominable has issued from this Holy See; no wonder, then, if the diseased condition has been transmitted from the head to the limbs, from the Pope to the prelates. We have all fallen by the way, and it has already been long since one of us has done any good thing, not even one." Elsewhere he instructs the legate to declare in his name that he, Hadrian, was not to be blamed for anything that has been done by the popes before him, and that such excesses, even when he was still living in a lowly estate, had always displeased (173) him, and so forth. One can easily imagine how such naivety on the part of the Pope must have been received by the Roman clergy; the least that was laid to his charge was that he had betrayed the Church to the heretics. This most impolitic measure by the Pope would, nevertheless, be worthy of our entire respect and admiration, if we could only convince ourselves that he was really naive, that is, that it had been elicited from him solely by the natural candor of his character without any consideration for the possible consequences, and that he would have done no less had he been aware of the whole extent of the imprudence involved. But we have some reason to believe that he took this course to be by no means so impolitic, and went so far in his innocence as to hope by his complaisance to have won from his adversaries something very important to the advantage of his Church. He not only imagined that as a man of honor he was obliged to take this step, but also he could justify it as Pope; but, since he forgot that the most artificial of all institutions could be



maintained only by a continued denial of the truth, he committed the inexcusable error of applying rules of conduct which might have proven correct under natural circumstances in an entirely opposite situation. This perforce much alters our judgment; and even if we cannot withhold our respect for the uprightness of the heart from which that action flowed, yet it is not a little diminished by the consideration that here nature had too weak an opponent in art, and the heart in the head.

Every true genius must be naive, or it is not genius. Only its naivety makes for its genius, and what it is intellectually and aesthetically it cannot disavow morally. Unacquainted with the rules, those crutches for weakness and taskmasters of awkwardness, led only by nature or by instinct, its guardian angel, it goes calmly and (174) surely through all the snares of false taste in which, if it is not shrewd enough to avoid them from afar, the nongenius must inevitably be entrapped. Only to genius is it given to be at home beyond the accustomed and to *extend* nature without *going beyond* her. It is true that sometimes the latter befalls even the greatest geniuses, but only because even they have their moments of fantasy in which protective nature abandons them either because they are engrossed by the power of example, or because the perverted taste of their times misleads them.

The genius must solve the most complex tasks with unpretentious simplicity and facility; the egg of Columbus appears in every decision of genius. And only thus does genius identify itself as such, by triumphing over the complications of art by simplicity. It proceeds not by the accepted principles, but by flashes of insight and feeling; but its insights are the inspirations of a



god (everything done by healthy nature is divine), its feelings are laws for all ages and for all races of men.

The childlike character that the genius imposes upon his works he likewise displays in his private life and morals. He is *chaste*, for this nature always is; but he is not *prudish*, for only decadence is prudish. He is *intelligent*, for nature can never be otherwise; but he is not *cunning*, for only art can be so. He is *true* to his character and his inclinations, but not so much because he possesses principles as because nature, despite all fluctuations, always returns to its former state, always revives the old necessity. He is *modest*, even shy, because genius always remains a mystery to itself; but he is not fearful, because he does not know the dangers of the path he travels. We know little of the private lives of the greatest geniuses, but even the little that is preserved, for example, of Sophocles, Archimedes, Hippocrates, and, in more recent times, (175) of Ariosto, Dante, and Tasso, of Raphael, of Albrecht Dürer, Cervantes, Shakespeare, of Fielding, Sterne, etc., confirms this assertion.

Indeed, and this seems to present much more difficulty, even great statesmen and generals, if their greatness is due to their genius, will display a naive character. Among the ancients I cite only Epaminondas and Julius Caesar, among moderns only Henri IV of France, Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden, and Czar Peter the Great. The Duke of Marlborough, Turenne, and Vendôme all display this character. It is to the opposite sex that nature has assigned the naive character in its highest perfection. Woman's desire to please manifests itself nowhere so much as in seeking the *appearance of naivety*; proof enough, even if one had no other, that the greatest power of the sex depends upon this char-



acteristic. But since the leading principles of feminine education are in perpetual conflict with this character, it is as difficult for a woman morally as it is for a man intellectually to preserve this magnificent gift of nature intact along with the advantages of a good education; and the *woman* who combines naivety of manner with a demeanor appropriate for society, is as worthy of the highest esteem as the scholar who joins the genius' freedom of thought with all the rigors of the schools.

From the naive mode of thought there necessarily follows naive expression in word as well as in gesture, and this is the most important element in gracefulness. By this naive grace genius expresses its most sublime and profound thought; the utterances of a god in the mouth of a child. The understanding of the schools, always fearful of error, crucifies its words and its concepts upon the cross of grammar and logic, and is severe and stiff to avoid uncertainty at all costs, employs many words to be quite sure of not saying too much, and deprives its thoughts of their strength and edge (176) so that they may not cut the unwary.<sup>9</sup> But genius delineates its own thoughts at a single felicitous stroke of the brush with an eternally determined, firm, and yet absolutely free outline. If to the former the sign remains forever heterogeneous and alien to the thing signified, to the latter language springs as by some inner necessity out of thought, and is so at one with it that even beneath the corporeal frame the spirit appears as if laid bare. It is precisely this mode of expression in which the sign disappears completely in the thing signified, and in which language, while giving expression to a thought, yet leaves it exposed where otherwise it cannot be represented without simultane-



ously concealing it; and this it is we generally call a gifted style displaying genius.<sup>10</sup>

As freely and naturally as genius expresses itself in its works of the spirit, its innocence of heart is expressed in its social intercourse. Because we have fallen to the same degree as far short from simplicity and strict truth of expression in life in society as from simplicity of temperament, our easily wounded guilt, as well as our easily seduced powers of imagination, have made a timid propriety necessary. Without being false, one often speaks otherwise than one thinks; one is forced into periphrasis in order to say things which could cause pain only to a sick egotism or danger to a perverted fantasy. Ignorance of these conventional rules combined with natural sincerity that despises every crumb and trace of falsity (not crudity, which it ignores as offensive), produces a naivety of expression in society that consists of calling things which one may mention either only in some artificial manner, or not at all, by their true names and in the most succinct fashion. Of this sort are the customary expressions of children. They arouse laughter by their contrast with the usages, but one must always confess in one's heart that the child is right.

(177) The naive temperament, strictly speaking, can indeed be ascribed only to the human being as a being not absolutely subject to nature, even though only insofar as pure nature actually still is active within him; but by an effect of the poetaster's imagination it is often transferred from the rational to the irrational. Thus we often attribute a naive character to an animal, a landscape, a building, even to nature in general, in opposition to the caprice and the fantastic concepts of



men. But this always demands that we assign a will to the involuntary in our thoughts and insist on its rigorous consequence according to the law of necessity. The dissatisfaction at our own badly abused moral freedom and at the moral harmony we sense is lacking in our actions easily induces a mood in which we address the irrational as a person, making a virtue of its eternal uniformity, and envying its calm bearing, as though there were really some temptation to be otherwise which it had resisted. At such a moment it suits us well to take the prerogative of our reason as a curse and an evil and, in our lively apprehension of the imperfection of our actual performance, lose sight of the economy of our predisposition and determination.

Then we see in irrational nature only a happier sister who remained in our mother's house, out of which we impetuously fled abroad in the arrogance of our freedom. With painful nostalgia we yearn to return as soon as we have begun to experience the pressure of civilization and hear in the remote lands of art our mother's tender voice. As long as we were children of nature merely, we enjoyed happiness and perfection; we became free, and lost both. Thence arises a dual and very unequal longing for nature, (178) a longing for her *happiness*, a longing for her *perfection*. The sensuous man bemoans the loss of the first; only the moral man can grieve at the loss of the other.

Then ask of yourself, sensitive friend of nature, whether your lassitude craves her peace, your injured morality her harmony? Ask yourself, when art revolts you and the abuses in society drive you to lifeless nature in loneliness, whether it is society's deprivations, its burdens, its tedium, or whether it is its moral anarchy, its arbitrariness, its disorders that you despise in



it? In the former your courage must joyfully rush in, and the substitute you offer must be the freedom whence they derive. You may indeed retain the calm happiness of nature as your distant object, but only as one which is the reward of your worthiness. Then no more of complaints at the difficulties of life, of the inequality of stations, of the pressure of circumstances, of the uncertainty of possession, of ingratitude, oppression, persecution; with free resignation, you must subject yourself to all the *ills* of civilization, respect them as the natural conditions of the only good; only its *evil* you must mourn, but not with vain tears alone. Rather, take heed that beneath that mire you remain pure, beneath that serfdom, free; constant in that capricious flux, acting lawfully in that anarchy. Be not afraid of the confusion around you, only of the confusion within you; strive after unity, but do not seek conformity; strive after calm, but through harmony, not through the cessation of your activity. That nature which you envy in the irrational is worthy of no respect, no longing. It lies behind you, and must lie eternally behind you. Abandoned by the ladder that supported you, no other choice now lies open to you, but with free consciousness and will to grasp the law, or fall without hope of rescue into a bottomless pit.

(179) But when you are consoled at the lost *happiness* of nature then let her *perfection* be your heart's example. If you march out toward her from your artificial environment she will stand before you in her great calm, in her naive beauty, in her childlike innocence and simplicity—then linger at this image, cultivate this emotion; this is worthy of your sublimest humanity. Let it no longer occur to you to want to exchange with her, but take her up within yourself



and strive to wed her eternal advantage with your eternal prerogative,<sup>11</sup> and from both produce the divine. Let her surround you like an enchanting idyll in which you can always find yourself safe from the waywardness of art, and in which you accumulate courage and new confidence for the race, and which lights anew in your heart the flame of the ideal which is so easily extinguished in the storms of life.

If one recalls the beautiful nature that surrounded the ancient Greeks; if one ponders how familiarly this people could live with free nature beneath their fortunate skies, how very much closer their mode of conception, their manner of perception, their morals, were to simple nature, and what a faithful copy of this their poetry is, then the observation must be displeasing that one finds so little trace among them of the *sentimental* interest with which we moderns are attached to the scenes and characters of nature. The Greek is indeed to the highest degree precise, faithful, and circumstantial in describing them, yet simply no more so and with no more preferential involvement of his heart than he displays in the description of a tunic, a shield, a suit of armor, some domestic article, or any mechanical product. In his love of an object, he does not seem to make any distinction between those which appear of themselves, and those which arise as a result of art or the human will. Nature seems to interest his understanding and craving for knowledge more than his moral feeling; he (180) does not cling to her with fervor, with sentimentality, with sweet melancholy, as we moderns do. Indeed, by hypostatizing nature's individual phenomena, treating them as gods, and their effects as the acts of free beings, the Greek eliminates that calm necessity of nature precisely in virtue of which



she is so attractive to us. His impatient fantasy leads him beyond nature to the drama of human life. Only the live and free, only characters, acts, destinies, and customs satisfy him, and if *we*, in certain moral moods of the mind, might wish to surrender the advantage of our freedom of will, which exposes us to so much conflict within ourselves, to so much unrest and errant by-paths, to the choiceless but calm necessity of the irrational, the fantasy of the Greek, in direct opposition to this, is engaged in rooting human nature in the inanimate world and assigning influence to the will where blind necessity reigns.

Whence derive these different spirits? How is it that we, who are in everything which is nature so boundlessly inferior to the ancients, offer tribute to nature just in this regard to such a higher degree, cling to her with fervor, and embrace even the inanimate world with the warmest sensibility? It is *because* nature in us has disappeared from humanity and we rediscover her in her truth only outside it, in the inanimate world. Not in our greater *accord with nature*, but quite the contrary, the *unnaturalness* of our situation, conditions, and moods forces us to procure a satisfaction in the physical world, since none is to be hoped for in the moral; for the incipient impulse for truth and simplicity which, like the moral tendency whence it derives, lies incorruptible and inalienable in every human heart. For this reason the feeling by which we are attached to nature is so closely related to the feeling with which we mourn the lost age of childhood (181) and childlike innocence. Our childhood is the only undisfigured nature that we still encounter in civilized mankind, hence it is no wonder if every trace of the nature outside us leads us back to our childhood.



It was quite otherwise with the ancient Greeks.\* With them civilization did not manifest itself to such an extent that nature was abandoned in consequence. The whole structure of their social life was founded on perceptions, not on a contrivance of art; their theology itself was the inspiration of a naive feeling, the child of a joyous imaginative power, not of grovelling reason like the church beliefs of modern nations; since, then, the Greek had not lost nature in his humanity, he could not be surprised by her outside it either and thus feel a pressing need for objects in which he might find her again. At one with himself and happy in the sense of his humanity he was obliged to remain with it as his maximum and assimilate all else to it; whereas *we*, not at one with ourselves and unhappy (182) in our experience of mankind, possess no more urgent interest than to escape from it and cast from our view so unsuccessful a form.

\* But also only with the Greeks; since just such an active motion and such a rich fullness of human life as surrounded the Greeks was required to breathe life even into the lifeless and to pursue the image of humanity with this avidity. For example, the world peopled by Ossian was shabby and uniform; the inanimate world that surrounded it, however, was broad, colossal and powerful, so it imposed itself and asserted its rights even over the people. In the songs of this poet, therefore, inanimate nature (in contrast with the people) figures much more than as an object of perception. Yet even Ossian complains of a decline of humanity and, as small among his people as the extent of civilization and its perversions was, yet the awareness of it was still lively and penetrating enough to drive the emotion-laden moral poet back to the inanimate and to pour out in his songs that elegiac tone that makes them so moving and attractive to us.

[Translator's note: Ossian, the alleged 3rd-century Irish author of epic poems by James Macpherson (1765). Schiller's observation of the sentimental tone confirms his argument, even though he seems unaware of the forgery.]



The feeling of which we here speak is therefore not that which the ancients possessed; it is rather identical with that which *we have for the ancients*. They felt naturally; we feel the natural. Without a doubt the feeling that filled Homer's soul as he made his divine swineherd regale Ulysses was quite different from that which moved young Werther's soul as he read this song after an irritating evening in society. Our feeling for nature is like the feeling of an invalid for health.

Just as nature began gradually to disappear from human life as *experience* and as the (active and perceiving) *subject*, so we see her arise in the world of poetry as *idea* and *object*. The nation that had brought this to the extremest degree both in the unnatural and in reflection thereon must have been first to be most moved by the phenomenon of the naive and gave it a name. This nation was, as far as I know, the French. But the feeling of the naive and interest in it is naturally much older and goes back even before the beginning of moral and aesthetic corruption. This change in the mode of perception is, for example, extremely obvious in Euripides, if one compares him with his predecessors, notably with Aeschylus, and yet the later poet was the favorite of his age. The same revolution can likewise be documented among the old historians. Horace, the poet of a cultivated and corrupt era, praises serene happiness in Tibur, and one could call him the founder of this sentimental mode of poetry as well as a still unexcelled model of it. In Propertius, too, and Vergil, among others, one finds traces of this mode of perception, less so in (183) Ovid, in whom the requisite fullness of heart was lacking and who in exile in Tomi painfully missed the happiness that Horace in Tibur so gladly dispensed with.



The poets are everywhere, as their very name suggests, the *guardians* of nature. Where they can no longer quite be so and have already felt within themselves the destructive influence of arbitrary and artificial forms or have had to struggle with them, then they will appear as the *witnesses* and *avengers* of nature. They will either *be* nature, or they will *seek* lost nature. From this arises two entirely different modes of poetry which, between them, exhaust and divide the whole range of poetry. All poets who are truly so will belong, according to the temper of the times in which they flourish, or according to the influence upon their general education or passing states of mind by fortuitous circumstances, either to the *naive* or to the *sentimental* poets.

The poet of a naive and bright youthful world, like the poet who in ages of artificial civilization is closest to him, is severe and modest like virginal Diana in her forests; without intimacy he flees the heart that seeks his, flees the desire that would embrace him. The dry truth with which he deals with the object seems not infrequently like insensitivity.<sup>12</sup> The object possesses him entirely, his heart does not lie like a tawdry alloy immediately beneath the surface, but like gold waits to be sought in the depths. Like divinity behind the world's structure he stands behind his work; *he* is the work, and the work is *he*; to ask only for *him* is not to be worthy of it, inadequate to it, or sated with it.

Thus, for example, Homer among the ancients and Shakespeare among the moderns reveal themselves; two vastly different natures separated by the immeasurable distance of the years, but *one* in precisely this trait of character. (184) When, at a very early age I first made the acquaintance of the latter poet, I was



incensed by his coldness, the insensitivity which permitted him to jest in the midst of the highest pathos, to interrupt the heartrending scenes in *Hamlet*, in *King Lear*, in *Macbeth*, etc., with a Fool; restraining himself now where my sympathies rushed on, then coldbloodedly tearing himself away where my heart would have gladly lingered. Misled by acquaintance with more recent poets into looking first for the poet in his work, to find *his* heart, to reflect in unison with *him* on his subject matter, in short, to observe the object in the subject, it was intolerable to me that here there was no way to lay hold of the poet, and nowhere to confront him. I studied him and he possessed my complete admiration for many years before I learned to love him as an individual. I was not yet prepared to understand nature at first hand. I could only support her image reflected in understanding and regulated by a rule, and for this purpose the sentimental poets of the French, and the Germans, too, of the period from 1750 to about 1780, were just the right subjects. However, I am not ashamed of this youthful judgment, since the old-established criticism had promulgated a similar one and was naive enough to publish it in the world.<sup>13</sup>

The same occurred to me with Homer also, whom I learned to know only at a later period. I recall now the curious point in the sixth book of the *Iliad* where Glaucus and Diomedes come face to face in the battle and, having recognized one another as guest-friends, afterwards exchange gifts. This touching depiction of the piety with which the rules of *hospitality* were observed even in battle can be compared with an account of the *knightly sense of nobility* in Ariosto, when two knights and rivals, Ferrau and Rinaldo, the latter a Christian, the former a Saracen, covered with wounds



after a violent duel, make peace and in order to overtake the fleeing Angelica, (185) mount the same horse. Both examples, as different as they may be otherwise, are almost alike in their effect upon our hearts, because both depict the beautiful victory of morals over passion and touch us by the naivety of their attitudes. But how differently the poets react in describing these similar actions. Ariosto, the citizen of a later world which had fallen from simplicity of manners, cannot, in recounting the occurrence, conceal his own wonderment and emotion. The feeling of the distance between those morals and those which characterized his own age overwhelms him. He abandons for a moment the portrait of the object and appears in his own person.<sup>14</sup> This beautiful stanza is well known and has always been greatly admired:

O nobility of ancient knightly mode!  
Who once were rivals, divided still  
In godly faith, bitter pain still suffered,  
Bodies torn in enmity's wild struggle,  
Free of suspicion, together rode  
Along the darkling crooked path.  
The steed, by four spurs driven, sped  
To where the road in twain divided.\*

And now old Homer! Scarcely has Diomedes learned from the narrative of Glaucus, his antagonist, that the latter's fathers were guest-friends of his deme, than he thrusts his lance into the ground, speaks in a friendly tone with him and agrees with him that in future they will avoid one another in battle. Let us, however, hear Homer himself:

\* *Orlando Furioso*, First Canto, Stanza 22.



In me you will now have a good friend in Argos, and I shall have you in Lycia, if ever I visit that country. So let us avoid each other's spears, even in the melee, since there are plenty of the Trojans and their famous allies for me to kill, if I have the luck and speed to catch them, and plenty of Achaeans for you to slaughter, if you can. (186) And let us exchange our armor, so that everyone may know that our grandfathers' friendship has made friends of us. With no more said, they leapt from their chariots, shook hands, and pledged each other.

It would hardly be possible for a *modern* poet (at least, hardly one who is a poet in the moral sense of the word) to have waited even this long before expressing his pleasure at this action. We would forgive him this all the more readily because, even in reading, our hearts pause, and gladly detach themselves from the object in order to look within. But of all this, not a trace in Homer; as though he had reported something quite everyday; indeed, as though he possessed no heart in his bosom, he continues in his dry truthfulness:

But Zeus the son of Cronos must have robbed Glaucus of his wits, for he exchanged with Diomedes golden armor for bronze, a hundred oxen's worth for the value of nine.\*

Poets of this naive category are no longer at home in an artificial age. They are indeed scarcely even possible, at least in no other wise possible except they *run wild* in their own age, and are preserved by some favorable destiny from its crippling influence. From society itself they can never arise; but from outside it they still sometimes appear, but rather as strangers at

\* *Iliad*, Book VI. [Trl. E. V. Rieu, Penguin ed., 1950, p. 123.]



whom one stares, and as uncouth sons of nature by whom one is irritated. As beneficent as such phenomena are for the artist who studies them and for the true connoisseur who is able to appreciate them, they yet elicit little joy on the whole and in their own century. The stamp of the conqueror is marked upon their brows; but we would rather be coddled and indulged by the Muses. (187) By the critics, the true gamekeepers of taste, they are detested as trespassers whom one would prefer to suppress; for even Homer owes it only to the power of more than a thousand years of testimony that those who sit in judgment on taste permit him to stand; and it is unpleasant enough for them to maintain their rules against his example and his reputation against their rules.<sup>15</sup>

[THE SENTIMENTAL POETS (*Die Horen*, No. 12, 1795)]

The poet, I said, either *is* nature or he will *seek* her. The former is the naive, the latter the sentimental poet.

The poetic spirit is immortal and inalienable in mankind, it cannot be lost except together with humanity or with the capacity for it. For even if man should separate himself by the freedom of his fantasy and his understanding from the simplicity, truth and necessity of nature, yet not only does the way back to her remain open always, but also a powerful and ineradicable impulse, the moral, drives him ceaselessly back to her, and it is precisely with this impulse that the poetic faculty stands in the most intimate relationship.

Even now, nature is the sole flame at which the poetic spirit nourishes itself; from her alone it draws



its whole power, to her alone it speaks even in the artificial man entailed by civilization. All other modes of expression are alien to the poetic spirit; hence, generally speaking, all so-called works of wit are quite misnamed poetic; although, for long, misled by the reputation of French literature, we have mistaken them as such. It is still nature, I say, even now in the artificial condition of civilization, in virtue of which the poetic spirit is powerful; but now it stands in quite another relation to nature.

So long as man is pure—not, of course (188), crude <sup>16</sup>—nature, he functions as an undivided sensuous unity and as a unifying whole. Sense and reason, passive and active faculties, are not separated in their activities, still less do they stand in conflict with one another. His perceptions are not the formless play of chance, his thoughts not the empty play of the faculty of representation; the former proceed out of the law of *necessity*, the latter out of *actuality*. Once man has passed into the state of civilization and art has laid her hand upon him, that *sensuous* harmony in him is withdrawn, and he can now express himself only as a *moral* unity, i.e., as striving after unity. The correspondence between his feeling and thought which in his first condition *actually* took place, exists now only *ideally*; it is no longer within him, but outside of him, as an idea still to be realized, no longer as a fact in his life. If one now applies the notion of poetry, which is nothing but *giving mankind its most complete possible expression*, to both conditions, the result in the earlier state of natural simplicity is the completest possible *imitation of actuality*—at that stage man still functions with all his powers simultaneously as a harmonious unity and hence the whole of his nature is



expressed completely in actuality; whereas now, in the state of civilization where that harmonious cooperation of his whole nature is only an idea, it is the elevation of actuality to the ideal or, amounting to the same thing, the *representation of the ideal*, that makes for the poet. And these two are likewise the only possible modes in which poetic genius can express itself at all. They are, as one can see, extremely different from one another, but there is a higher concept under which both can be subsumed, and there should be no surprise if this concept should coincide with the idea of humanity.

(189) This is not the place further to pursue these thoughts, which can only be expounded in full measure in a separate disquisition.<sup>17</sup> But anyone who is capable of making a comparison, based on the spirit and not just on the accidental forms, between ancient and modern poets,\* will be able readily to convince himself of the truth of the matter. The former move us by nature, by sensuous truth, by living presence; the latter by ideas.

This path taken by the modern poets is, moreover, that along which man in general, the individual as well as the race, must pass. Nature sets him at one with himself, art divides and cleaves him in two, through the ideal he returns to unity. But because the

\* It is perhaps not superfluous to remark that if here the new poets are set over against the ancients, the difference of manner rather than of time is to be understood. We possess in modern times, even most recently, naive works of poetry in all classes, even if no longer of the purest kind and, among the old Latin, even among the Greek poets, there is no lack of sentimental ones. Not only in the same poet, even in the same work one often encounters both species combined, as, for example, in *Werthers Leiden*, and such creations will always produce the greater effects.



we can indeed be moved to a weaker or stronger degree, but (as soon as the matter is abstracted) never heterogeneously. Our feeling is uniformly the same, entirely composed of *one* element, so that we cannot differentiate within it. Even the difference of language and era changes nothing in this regard, for just this pure unity of its origin and of its effect is a characteristic of naive poetry.

The case is quite otherwise with the sentimental poet. He *reflects* upon the impression that objects make upon him, and only in that reflection is the emotion grounded which he himself experiences and which he excites in us. The object here (193) is referred to an idea and his poetic power is based solely upon this referral. The sentimental poet is thus always involved with two conflicting representations and perceptions—with actuality as a limit and with his idea as infinitude; and the mixed feelings that he excites will always testify to this dual source.\* Since in this case there is a plurality of principles it depends which of the two will *predominate* in the perception of the poet and in his representation, and hence a variation in the treatment is possible. For now the question arises whether he will tend more toward actuality or toward the ideal

\* Anyone who observes the impression that naive poetry makes on him and is able to separate from it that part which is due to the content will find this impression always joyous, always pure, always serene, even in the case of very pathetic objects; with sentimental poetry it will always be somewhat solemn and intense. This is because with naive accounts, regardless of their subject matter, we always rejoice in our imagination in the truth, in the living presence of the object, and seek nothing further beyond these; whereas with the sentimental we have to reconcile the representation of imagination with an idea of reason and hence always fluctuate between two different conditions.



—whether he will realize the former as an object of antipathy or the latter as an object of sympathy. His presentation will, therefore, be either *satirical* or it will be (in a broader connotation of the word which will become clearer later) *elegiac*; every sentimental poet will adhere to one of these two modes of perception.

[*Satirical Poetry*]

The poet is satirical if he takes as his subject alienation from nature and the contradiction between actuality and the ideal (in their effect upon the mind both amount to the same thing). (194) But this he can execute either seriously and with passion, or jokingly and with good humor, according as he dwells in the realm of will or the realm of understanding. The former is a function of punitive or pathetic satire, the latter of playful satire.

Strictly speaking, the poet's purpose is compatible neither with the accent of correction nor with that of amusement. The former is too solemn for that play which poetry should always be; the latter too frivolous for the solemnity which must underlie all poetic play.<sup>18</sup> Moral contradictions necessarily interest our hearts and therefore deprive our minds of their freedom; yet every substantive interest, i.e., any reference to a necessity, should be banished from poetic emotion. Contradictions of the understanding, on the other hand, leave the heart indifferent, and yet the poet is concerned with the highest promptings of the heart, with nature, and with the ideal. Hence it is no small task for him in pathetic satire to avoid doing injury to the poetic form which subsists in freedom of play; and in playful satire not to fall short of the poetic content which must always be the infinite. This undertaking



of experience. In the representation of offending actuality everything depends therefore upon necessity's being the basis on which the poet or narrator presents the actual, if he is to be able to attune our spirits to ideas. If only *we* remain lofty in our judgment nothing is lost if the subject remains base and far beneath us. When the historian Tacitus depicts for us the profound depravity of the Romans of the first century he is still a superior spirit who looks down upon the base, and our mood is truly poetic because only the height where he himself stands and to which he was able to elevate us makes his subject base.

Pathetic satire must, therefore, always derive from a temperament that is vigorously permeated by the ideal. Only a predominant impulse toward harmony (196) can and may produce that profound sense of moral contradiction and that burning indignation against moral perversity which becomes the inspiration of a Juvenal, a Swift, a Rousseau, a Haller,<sup>20</sup> and others. These poets would and must have written with the same felicity also in the more moving and tender forms if fortuitous causes had not given this definite tendency to their temperaments; and this they have actually done to some extent. All those mentioned have lived either in a depraved era and saw before them a fearful spectacle of moral decay, or their own fates had sown bitterness in their souls. Even the philosophical spirit, since he separates with implacable rigor appearances from essence, and penetrates into the depths of things, inclines to that severity and austerity with which Rousseau, Haller, and others depict actuality. But these extraneous and coincidental influences which always have an inhibiting effect may at most determine the tendency only, never supply the content of



inspiration. This must be the same in everyone and, free of every external constraint, must flow out of a burning impulse for the ideal which is absolutely the only true vocation for the satiric as for the sentimental poet in general.

If pathetic satire is appropriate only to sublime souls, playful satire will succeed only with a beautiful soul. For the first is already secured from frivolity by its serious subject; but the second, which may treat only a morally neutral subject, would lapse unavoidably into frivolity, and lose all poetic value if in this case the manner did not ennoble the matter and the poet's *personality* did not stand in place of his *theme*. But it is given only to the beautiful heart in all its utterances to impress a complete image of itself independently of the subject of its activity. The sublime character can manifest itself only in discrete victories over the resistance of the (197) senses, only in certain instants of impetus and momentary effort; but in the beautiful soul the ideal functions as nature, that is, uniformly, and hence can reveal itself even in a state of calm. The fathomless sea appears most sublime in its motion, the pellucid brook most beautiful in its serene flow.

It has frequently been disputed which of the two, tragedy or comedy, merits precedence over the other. If the question is merely which of the two treats of the more important subject matter, there can be no doubt that the first has the advantage; but if one would know which of the two demands the more significant poet, then the decision may rather fall to the latter. In tragedy much is already determined by the substance, in comedy nothing is determined by the substance and everything by the poet. Since in judg-



ments of taste the content is never taken into account it follows naturally that the aesthetic value of these two artistic genres stands in inverse proportion to their substantive significance. The tragic poet is supported by his theme, the comic poet on the other hand must raise his to aesthetic height through his own person. The first may make a leap for which, however, not much is required; the other must remain himself, he must therefore already *be* there and be at home there where the first cannot attain without a starting leap. And it is precisely in this way that the beautiful character is distinguished from the sublime. In the first, all the dimensions are already contained, flowing unconstrainedly and effortlessly by its nature and it is, according to its capacity, an infinitude at every point in its path; the other can elevate and exert itself to any dimension, by the power of its will it can tear itself out of any state of limitation. The latter is, then, only intermittently and with effort free, the former with facility and always.

To promote and nourish this freedom of temperament (198) is the fair task of comedy just as tragedy is destined to help to restore by aesthetic means the freedom of temperament when it has been violently disrupted by emotion. In tragedy, therefore, freedom of temperament must be artificially and experimentally disrupted, since it displays its poetic power in the restoration of that freedom; in comedy, on the other hand, care must be taken to assure that that disruption of the freedom of temperament should never occur. Hence the tragic poet always treats his subject practically, the comic poet always treats his theoretically, even if the former should indulge the quirk (like Lessing in his *Nathan*) of treating a theoretical subject, or



of the latter of treating a practical subject. Not the sphere from which the subject is drawn, but the forum before which the poet brings it makes it tragic or comic. The tragedian must beware of calm reasoning and always engage the heart; the comedian must beware of pathos and always entertain the understanding. The former thus displays his art by the constant excitement of passion, the latter by constant avoidance of it; and this art is naturally so much the greater on both parts the more the subject of one is of an abstract nature, and that of the other tends toward the pathetic.\* Even if tragedy proceeds from a more significant point, one is obliged to concede, on the other hand, that comedy proceeds toward a more significant purpose and it would, were it to attain it, render all tragedy superfluous and impossible. Its purpose is uniform with the highest after which man has to struggle, to be free of passion, (199) always clear, to look serenely about and within himself, to find everywhere more coincidence than fate, and rather to laugh at absurdity than to rage or weep at malice.

As in actual life, it often happens in poetic works also that mere frivolity, pleasing talent, amiable good

\* In *Nathan the Wise* this is not the case; here the frosty nature of the theme has cooled the whole art work. But Lessing himself knew that he was not writing a tragedy and simply forgot in his own case, humanly enough, his own doctrine propounded in the *Dramaturgy* that the poet is not permitted to employ the tragic form for other than a tragic purpose. Without very substantial (199) changes it would hardly be possible to transform this dramatic poem into a good tragedy; but with merely incidental changes it might have yielded a good comedy. For the latter purpose the pathetic would have to be sacrificed, for the former its reasoning, and there can be no question upon which of the two the beauty of the poem most depends. [Translator's note: cf. the posthumous fragment (XII 330, 18 ff.) on this issue.]



humor, are confused for beauty of soul, and since the vulgar taste can never raise itself above the pleasant it is easy enough for such *lightsome* spirits to usurp the fame which is so difficult to earn. But there is an infallible test by means of which lightness of disposition can be distinguished from lightness of the ideal, as well as virtue of temperament from true morality of character, and this is when both confront a difficult and great theme. In such a case the precious genius inevitably collapses into the banal, as does virtue of temperament<sup>21</sup> into the material; the truly beautiful soul, however, passes over as certainly into the sublime.

So long as Lucian<sup>22</sup> merely castigates absurdity, as in the *Wishes*, the *Lapithae*, in *Zeus Rants*, etc., he remains a mocker and delights us with his joyful humor; but he becomes quite another man in many passages of his *Nigrinus*, his *Timon*, his *Alexander*, in which his satire strikes also at moral decay. "Unhappy wretch," he begins in his *Nigrinus* the shocking picture of contemporary Rome, "why did you leave the light of the sun, (200) Greece, and that happy life of freedom, and come here into this turmoil of sumptuous servitude, of dancing attendance, of banquets, of sycophants, flatterers, poisoners, legacy-hunters, and false friends?" etc. On this and similar occasions is revealed the high solemnity of feeling that must underlie all play if it is to be poetic. Even in the malicious joke with which Lucian as well as Aristophanes abuses Socrates one perceives a serious reason which avenges truth upon the sophist—battles on behalf of an ideal that it does not always articulate. The first of these two, in his *Diogenes* and *Demonax*, has justified this character beyond all doubt; among moderns, what a



great and noble character has Cervantes expressed on every worthy occasion in his *Don Quixote*! What a magnificent ideal must have dwelt in the soul of the poet who created a Tom Jones and a Sophia! How readily can laughing Yorick <sup>23</sup> touch our minds at will so loftily and so powerfully! In our own Wieland also I recognize this seriousness of feeling; even the wanton play of his moods is ensouled and ennobled by grace of heart; even in the rhythm of his song its impress is manifest, and he never lacks the impetus to carry us, if the moment is apt, to the greatest heights.

No comparable judgment can be passed on Voltaire's satire. True enough, even with this writer it is still only the truth and simplicity of nature by which he sometimes moves us poetically, either because he really attains to it in a naive character, as frequently in his *Ingénu*, or because he seeks and defends it, as in *Candide*, etc. If neither of these two is the case then he may indeed amuse us as a witty fellow, but certainly not as a poet. Everywhere too little seriousness underlies his ridicule, and this justly brings his poetic vocation under suspicion. (201) We perpetually encounter only his understanding, never his feeling. No ideal is manifest beneath that airy frame and scarcely anything absolutely fixed in that ceaseless motion. Far from displaying any evidence for the inner abundance of his spirit, his wonderful variety of external forms gives rather a dubious testimony to the opposite effect, for despite all those forms he has not found even *one* upon which to leave the impress of his heart. One must therefore almost fear that in this richly endowed genius it was only poverty of feeling that determined his satiric vocation. Had this been otherwise he must surely somewhere along his broad career have de-



parted from this narrow way. But despite the tremendous variety of content and external form we see the endless recurrence of this inner form in all its indigent uniformity, and despite his massive career he never fulfilled in himself the cycle of humanity which one joyfully finds permeating the satirists mentioned above.

[*Elegiac Poetry*]

If the poet should set nature and art, the ideal and actuality, in such opposition that the representation of the first prevails and pleasure in it becomes the predominant feeling, then I call him *elegiac*. This category, too, like satire, comprehends two species. Either nature and the ideal are an object of sadness if the first is treated as lost and the second as unattained. Or both are an object of joy represented as actual. The first yields the *elegy* in the narrower sense, and the second the *idyll* in the broader sense.\*

\* That I employ the terms satire, elegy, and idyll in a wider sense than is customary, I will hardly have to explain to readers who penetrate deeper into the matter. My intention in doing so is by no means to disrupt the boundaries which have been set for good reasons by usage hitherto for satire and elegy as well as idyll; I look merely at the *mode of perception* predominant in these poetic categories, and it (202) is sufficiently well known that these cannot be accommodated at all within those narrow limits. We are not moved elegiacally solely by the elegy which is exclusively so called: the dramatic and epic poets can also move us in the elegiac manner. In the *Messiah*, in Thomson's *Seasons*, in *Paradise Lost*, in *Jerusalem Delivered*, we find numerous depictions which are otherwise proper only to the idyll, the elegy, and to satire. Likewise, to a greater or lesser degree, in almost every pathetic poem. But that I account the idyll itself as an elegiac category does seem to require justification. It should be recalled, though, that here I speak only of that kind of idyll that is a species of sentimental



Just as indignation from the pathetic, and mockery from the playful, satire, sadness may derive from elegy (203) only from enthusiasm awakened by the ideal. Only thus does elegy receive poetic content, and every other source of it is beneath the dignity of the art of poetry. The elegiac poet seeks nature, but in her beauty, not merely in her pleasantness, in her correspondence with ideas, not just in her acquiescence in necessity. Sadness at lost joys, at the golden age now disappeared from the world, at happiness departed with youth, with love, and so forth, can only become the material of an elegiac poem if those states of sensuous satisfaction can also be construed as matters of

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poetry, to the essence of which belongs the notion that nature is *opposed* to art, and the ideal to actuality. Even if this is not rendered explicit by the artist and he offers to our view a pure and spontaneous portrait of unspoiled nature or of the ideal fulfilled, yet that opposition is still within his heart and will betray itself in every stroke of the brush, even against his will. For even if this were not so, then the very language which he must employ, because it bears the spirit of the age and has undergone the influence of art, would serve to remind us of actuality and its limitations, of civilization with its mannerism; indeed, our own heart would oppose to that picture of pure nature its experience of corruption and thus render the mode of perception elegiac in us even though this had not been sought by the poet. This last is so unavoidable that even the highest delight which the finest works of the naive genus of ancient and modern times assure to the cultivated individual do not for long remain pure, but sooner or later will be accompanied by an elegiac mood. Finally, I would still observe that the division attempted here, for the very reason that it is simply based on the distinction of mode of perception, should by no means whatever determine the division of poetry itself nor the derivation of poetic genres; since the poet is in no way bound, even in a single work, to the same mode of perception, that division therefore cannot apply, (203) but must be taken from the form of the presentation.



moral harmony. Thus I cannot consider the lamentations of Ovid which he chanted from his place of exile on the Black Sea, moving as they are and containing so much that is poetic in individual passages, as being as a whole a poetic work. There is far too little energy, far too little spirit and nobility in his pain. Necessity, not inspiration, utters those laments; in them breathes, if not actually a vulgar soul, yet the vulgar mood of a finer spirit that has been crushed by its fate. Still, when we recall that it is Rome and the Rome of Augustus for which he sorrows, we forgive the son of pleasure his pain; but even magnificent Rome, with all its enchantments, is still (if the power of imagination has not first ennobled it) only a finite quantity, hence an unworthy object for the poetic art which, superior to everything that actuality has to offer, possesses the right to mourn only for the infinite.

The content of poetic lamentation can therefore never be an external object, it must always be only an ideal, inner one; even if it grieves over some loss in actuality, it must first be transformed into an ideal (204) loss. In this assimilation of the finite to the infinite, poetic treatment in fact subsists. The external matter is, therefore, always indifferent in itself since the poetic art can never employ it as it occurs, but only by means of what poetry makes of it does it receive its poetic value. The elegiac poet seeks nature, but as an idea and in a perfection in which she has never existed, when he bemourns her at once as something having existed and now lost. When Ossian tells of the days which are no more, and of the heroes who have disappeared, his poetic power has long since transformed those images of recollection into ideals, and those heroes into gods. The experience of a par-



ticular loss has been broadened into the idea of universal evanescence and the bard, affected and pursued by the image of omnipresent ruin, elevates himself to the skies to find there, in the cycle of the sun, an image of the immutable.\*

I turn now to the modern poets of the elegiac category. Rousseau, both as poet and as philosopher, reveals no other tendency but either to seek nature or to vindicate her by art. According as his feeling dwells on one or the other we find him sometimes elegiacally moved, sometimes, as in his *Julie*, enraptured in the realm of the idyll. Unquestionably his poems possess poetic content, since they are concerned with an ideal; but he does not know how to exploit it in a poetic manner. His serious character never permits him, it is true, to sink to frivolity, but it does not permit him either to rise to poetic play. Sometimes, gripped by passion, sometimes by abstraction, he rarely or never achieves the aesthetic freedom which the poet must maintain in relation to his material and communicate to his listener. Either it is his unhealthy (205) excess of feeling which overpowers him and renders his emotion painful; or it is his excess of thought that lays shackles upon his imagination, and by the rigor of his concepts destroys the grace of the depiction. Both characteristics, whose inner reciprocal workings and reconciliation in fact make for the poet, are present in this writer to an unusually high degree, and nothing is lacking except that they should manifest themselves in actual unison, that his intellectual activity should be combined with his feeling, and his sensitivity more combined with his thought. Hence, in the ideal that he

\* See, for example, the superb poem entitled *Carthou*.



himself the subject, if he would describe his feeling to us, we never learn of his condition directly and at first hand, but rather how he has reflected in his own mind, what he has thought about it as an observer of himself. When Haller is lamenting the death of his wife (in a well known poem), and begins as follows:

Shall I sing of thy death?  
O Mariane, what a song!  
When sighs contest with words  
And one idea flees before the rest, etc.

then we may indeed find this description exactly true, but we feel also that the poet has not actually communicated his feelings but his thought about the matter. He therefore moves us much more feebly also, because he must himself have been very much cooler to be an observer of his own emotion.

The predominantly supersensuous material alone of Haller's and, in part, of Klopstock's poetry excludes them from the naive category; hence, for that material to be poetically treated, it must (since it cannot assume any corporeal nature and in consequence cannot become an object of sensuous intuition) be translated into the eternal and be elevated into an object of spiritual intuition. Generally speaking, didactic poetry can only be conceived of without inner contradiction in this sense; for, to repeat this once again, the art of poetry comprehends these two realms only: (207) either it must dwell in the world of sense or in the world of ideas, since it absolutely cannot flourish in the realm of concepts or in the world of understanding. I confess that I have yet to encounter the poem of this order either in ancient or modern literature that was able to lead the concept which it treated purely



and completely either downward to individuality or upward to the idea. It is usually the case, when it is successful at all, that the poem fluctuates between both, while the abstract concept dominates, and imagination, which should be in command in the poetic realm, is simply subordinated to the service of the understanding. The didactic poem in which the thought is itself poetic and remains so has yet to be seen.

What has been said here in general about all didactic poetry applies in particular to Haller. The thought itself is not poetic, but the execution sometimes is, either by the employment of the images, or by its soaring to ideas. Only in this latter quality do they belong here. Strength and profundity and a pathetic seriousness characterize this poet. His spirit is kindled by an ideal and his glowing feeling for truth seeks in the stilly alpine valleys the innocence that has disappeared from the world. His lament is deeply moving: with energetic, almost bitter satire, he marks the distractions of understanding and heart; and with love the beautiful simplicity of nature. But the concept predominates everywhere in his descriptions, just as within himself understanding dominates over feeling. Hence, he *teaches* throughout more than he *represents*, and represents throughout more with powerful than with attractive strokes. He is great, daring, fiery, sublime; but he rarely, if ever, raises his work to beauty.

Kleist is far inferior to him in the content of his ideas and depth of spirit; in grace (208) he may be superior to him if we do not, as sometimes happens, account his weakness in the one aspect as a strength in the other. Kleist's emotion-laden soul expands most at the spectacle of rural scenes and usages. Gladly he escapes



from the empty turmoil of society and finds in the bosom of inanimate nature the harmony and peace that he misses in the moral world. How affecting is his longing for calm! \* How true and how felt when he sings:

Aye, world, thou truly art the grave of life.  
Often am I urged by an impulse to virtue,  
And melancholy draws many a tear down my cheek,  
Example is victorious, and thou, oh fire of youth:  
Together drying up those noble tears.

To be true to humanity one must be far from men. Yet, if his poetic impulse has led him away from the constricting round of circumstances into the spiritual loneliness of nature, still he is pursued even this far by the anxious image of the age and unfortunately, too, by its fetters. What he flees lies within him, what he seeks is forever outside him; he can never overcome the bale influence of his generation. Even if his heart is sufficiently afire, his fantasy energetic enough, to ensoul the dead configurations of his understanding by his composition, still cold thought as often deprives the living creation of his poetic powers of its soul, and reflection disrupts the secret labor of feeling. His poetry is indeed as bright and sparkling as the spring that he celebrates in song, his fantasy is live and active; yet one must call it evanescent rather than rich, playful rather than creative, uneasily progressing rather than unifying and plastic. Rapidly and luxuriantly its features change, but without crystallizing themselves into a whole, without becoming filled with life and rounding themselves into a unity. So long as he merely writes lyrically and merely dwells upon

\* See the poem of this name in his works.



landscape images, partly the greater freedom (209) of lyrical form, partly the more arbitrary quality of his material permits us to overlook this shortcoming, since in this case we always demand the representation of the poet's feelings rather than of the subject itself. But the mistake becomes only too obvious when he goes out of his way, as in his *Cissides and Paches* and his *Seneca*, to depict human beings and human actions; for here the imaginative power finds itself hemmed in amid fixed and necessary limits, and the poetic effect can proceed only from the *subject*. Here he becomes insipid, dull, thin, and all but insupportably cold: an admonition to anyone who tries without inner vocation to project himself from the field of musical into the realm of plastic poetry. A similiar genius, Thomson, fell victim to the same, only human, feeling.<sup>25</sup>

In the sentimental genus, and particularly in the elegiac species of it, few poets of modern times and fewer still of antiquity may be compared with our Klopstock. Whatever could be attained in the realm of ideality, outside the boundaries of living form and outside the sphere of individuality, has been achieved by this musical poet.\* One would indeed do him a grave injustice (210) if one were altogether to deny him that individual truth and vivacity with which the naive

\* I say *musical* to recall here the dual relationship of poetry with music and plastic art. According as poetry either imitates a given *object* as the plastic arts do, or whether, like music, simply produces a given *state of mind*, without requiring a given object for the purpose, it can be called plastic or musical. The latter expression, therefore, does not refer exclusively to whatever is music in poetry actually and in relation to its material, but rather in general to all those effects which it is able to produce without subordinating the imagination to a given object; and in this sense I call Klopstock a musical poet above all.



poet depicts his theme. Many of his odes, several individual features of his dramas and of his *Messiah* portray the object with striking veracity and with beautiful circumscription; particularly where the object is his own heart, he has not infrequently displayed a lofty nature, an enchanting naivety. But *his* strength does not lie in this, this characteristics is not to be fulfilled throughout the whole of his poetic range. As superb a creation as the *Messiah* is in the *musical* poetic sense as defined above, yet much is left to be desired from the *plastic* poetic point of view in which one expects specific forms and forms *specific for sensuous intuition*. The personages in this poem may perhaps be specific enough, but not for intuition; abstraction alone has created them, only abstraction can distinguish them. They are fine examples of concepts, but not individuals, not living figures. It is left much too much to the imagination, to which nonetheless the poet must return and which he should command by the thoroughgoing specificity of his forms, in what manner these men and angels, this God and Satan, this heaven and this hell shall embody themselves. An outline is given within which the understanding must necessarily conceive of them, but no firm boundary is set within which fantasy must necessarily portray them. What I say here of the characters applies to everything that is or should be life and action in this poem; and not just in the epic, but also in the dramatic works of our poet. For the understanding everything is finely delineated and delimited (I mention here only his Judas, his Pilate, his Philo, his Salomo in the tragedy of that name), but it is far too formless for the imagination and here, I freely confess, I find the poet entirely out of his sphere.



(211) His sphere is always the realm of ideas, and he is able to transport everything he touches into the infinite. One might say he witnesses the matter out of everything he touches so as to transform it into spirit, just as other poets endow everything spiritual with matter. Virtually every pleasure that his poetry affords must be gained by the exercise of thought; all the feelings, however fervent and powerful, that he is able to engender in us stream forth from supersensuous sources. Hence the seriousness, the power, the impetus, the depth that characterizes everything that comes from him; hence also the perennial tension of the mind in which we are maintained in reading him. No poet (with the possible exception of Young,<sup>25a</sup> who demands more in this respect than Klopstock but without compensating for it as he does) would seem to be less apt to become a favorite and companion through life than Klopstock, who always leads us only away from life, always summons up only the spirit, without vivifying the senses with the serene presence of an object. His poetical muse is chaste, supermundane, incorporeal, holy, like his religion, and one must confess with admiration that even though he may sometimes go astray on these heights, he still has never fallen from them. I admit, therefore, without reserve, that I am somewhat fearful for the temperament of anyone who really and without affectation can make this poet his favorite reading, the kind of reading to which one can attune oneself in any mood, to which one can return from any mood; also, it would seem to me, we have seen enough in Germany of the fruits of his dangerous domination. Only in certain exalted frames of mind can he be sought out and appreciated; for this reason, too, he is the idol of the young, if by far not



their happiest choice. Youth, which always strives beyond the conditions of life, which escapes from all forms and finds any limitation too constricting, abandons itself with love and delight in the endless expanses opened up to it by this poet. (212) But when the boy becomes a man and returns from the realm of ideas into the limitations of experience, then much is lost, very much of that enthusiastic love, but not of the respect which is due to so unique a phenomenon, to so extraordinary a genius, to such very ennobled feeling, a respect which the German owes to such high merit.<sup>26</sup>

I called this poet great above all in the elegiac species, and it will hardly be necessary to justify this judgment in further detail. Equal to every effort and master of the entire range of sentimental poetry, he can now shake us with the highest pathos, now soothe us with celestially tender feelings; but above all his heart is inclined to a lofty spirit-filled melancholy and, as sublime as his harp, his lyre sounds, yet the melting tones of his lute <sup>26a</sup> will still ring truer and more deeply and movingly. I appeal to every purely attuned feeling and ask whether it would not gladly abandon everything bold and powerful, every fiction, every superb description, every model of oratorical eloquence in the *Messiah*, all the glittering similes in which our poet is so outstandingly successful—whether it would abandon all this for the sake of the tender feelings that are breathed forth in the elegy *To Ebert*, in the splendid poems *Bardale*, *Early Graves*, *Summer Night*, *Lake Zurich*, and many of this order. For as dear to me as the *Messiah* is as a treasure of elegiac feelings and ideal portrayals, it satisfies me less as the depiction of action or as an epic work.



Perhaps, before leaving this field, I should refer also to the merits of Uz, Denis, Gessner (in his *Death of Abel*), Jacobi, von Gerstenberg, of Hölty, von Göckingk,<sup>27</sup> and many others of this class, who all move us through ideas and, in the sense of the word defined above, have written as sentimental poets. But my purpose is not (213) to write a history of German poetry, but to illustrate what has been said by a few examples out of our literature. It was the variety of the path that I wanted to show, by which ancient and modern, naive and sentimental poets proceed to the same goal—that if the former move us through nature, individuality, and living *sensuousness*, the latter, by ideas and lofty *spirituality*, manifest an equally great, if not so widespread, power over our minds.

From the previous examples it could be seen how the sentimental poetic spirit treats a natural theme; but one might also be interested in knowing how the naive poetic spirit proceeds with a sentimental theme. This task appears to be completely new and of a quite unique difficulty, for in the ancient and naive world a *theme* of this kind did not occur, whereas in the modern the *poet* would be lacking. Nevertheless, genius has accepted this task also and has resolved it in an admirably felicitous manner. A personality who embraces the ideal with burning feeling and abandons actuality in order to contend with an insubstantial infinitude, who seeks continuously outside himself for that which he continuously destroys within himself, to whom only his dreams are the real, his experience perennial limitations, who in the end sees in his own existence only a limitation, and, as is reasonable, tears this down in order to penetrate to the true reality—this dangerous extreme of the sentimental personality



has become the theme of a poet in whom nature functions more faithfully and purely than any other, and who, among modern poets, is perhaps least removed from the sensuous truth of things.

It is interesting to note with what fortunate instinct everything that nourishes the sentimental character is concentrated in *Werther*: fanatically unhappy love, sensitivity (214) to nature, feeling for religion, a spirit of philosophical contemplation; finally, so that nothing shall be forgotten, the gloomy, formless, melancholic Ossianic world. If one takes account with how little recommendation, even in how hostile a manner actuality is contrasted with it, and how everything external unites to drive the tortured youth back into his world of ideals, then one sees no possibility how such a character could have saved himself from such a cycle. In the same poet's *Tasso* the same opposition occurs, albeit in quite different characters; even in his latest novel,<sup>28</sup> just as in that first one, the poetic spirit is set in opposition to plain common sense, the ideal over against the actual, the subjective mode of representation over against the objective—but with what a difference!; even in *Faust* we encounter the same opposition, of course insofar as the theme requires it, very coarsened and materialized on both sides;<sup>29</sup> it is well worth the effort to attempt to analyze the psychological development of this personality as it is manifested in four such different ways.

It was observed earlier that the merely carefree and jovial type of mind, when it is not based on an inner wealth of ideas, fails to yield a vocation for playful satire, as readily as popular opinion would assume this; just as little does merely tender effeminacy and melancholy provide a vocation for elegiac poetry.



Both are lacking that principle of energy that belongs to the true poetic gift, and that must animate its subject matter in order to produce the truly beautiful. Products of this delicate sort can, therefore, only melt us and, without enlivening the heart and engaging the spirit, they merely flatter sensuousness. A continuous tendency to this mode of feeling must, at the last, necessarily enervate the character and depress it into a condition of passivity out of which no reality at all can proceed, either for the external nor the inner life. It was, therefore, altogether warranted to pursue with implacable mockery that evil of *affected* (215) *feeling*\* and *lachrymose demeanor* which, as a result of the misunderstanding and aping of a few excellent works, began to gain the upper hand in Germany about 18 years ago,<sup>30</sup> even though the indulgence which there is a tendency to display toward the scarcely better counterpart of that elegiac caricature, toward facetious manners, toward heartless satire and pointless caprices \* makes it clear enough that they are not being exclaimed against for entirely pure rea-

\* "The tendency," as Herr Adelung defines it, "to sensitive, tender feelings without a rational intention and beyond due measure."—Herr Adelung is very fortunate that he feels only by intention, and even only by rational intention.

\* The wretched pleasures of certain readers should not, indeed, be marred, and in the final analysis, what concern is it of criticism if there are people who can regale and edify themselves with the sordid wit of Herr Blumauer. But the judges of art should at least refrain from speaking with a certain respect of works the existence of which might decently remain a secret from good taste. One cannot, indeed, mistake either the talent or the caprice they contain, but it is all the more to be regretted that both qualities are not more purified. I say nothing of our German comedies; the poets depict the age in which they live. [Translator's note: Alois Blumauer (1755-98), a low-grade Austrian humorist.]



sons. In the scales of genuine taste the one must have as little effect as the other, for both lack the aesthetic content which is contained only in the inmost combination of spirit and matter, and in the unified relation of a work to the faculties of feeling and ideas.

Siegwart and his cloister story have been mocked, and the *Journey to Southern France* <sup>31</sup> is admired; yet both works have an equal claim to a certain degree of appreciation; and an equally small one to unqualified praise. True, if extravagant, feeling makes for the value of the first novel, a delicate humor and a vivaciously (216) fine understanding for the second; but just as the first is entirely lacking in appropriate sobriety of understanding, the second is lacking in aesthetic dignity. The first is a little ridiculous in the light of experience, the other virtually contemptible compared with the ideal. But since the truly beautiful must correspond on the one hand with nature and on the other with the ideal, the first can lay as little claim as the second to the name of a beautiful work. Nonetheless it is natural and reasonable and I know from my own experience that Thümmel's novel is read with great pleasure. Since he offends only against those demands that originate in the ideal, which in consequence are not imposed at all by the greatest number of his readers and never by the better ones if they are reading a novel, yet he fulfills in no mean degree the remaining demands of the spirit—and of the body—and hence his must and will justifiably remain a favored book of our and every age in which aesthetic works are written simply in order to please, and are read simply for pleasure.

But does not poetic literature possess even classical works which offend the lofty purity of the ideal in a



like manner, and which seem by the materiality of their content to be very far removed from that spirituality which we here demand of every aesthetic work of art? What even the poet, that chaste apostle of the muse, may permit himself, should that be denied to the novelist, who is only his half-brother and still so very much earthbound? I can all the less avoid this question here since there exist in the elegiac as well as in the satiric class masterpieces in which a quite other nature from that of which this essay treats is sought, recommended, and gives the appearance of being defended not only against evil morals but also against good morals. Hence, either these poetic works would have to be rejected (217), or the concept established here of elegiac poetry must be taken as much too arbitrary.

Whatever the poet may permit himself, was the question; should that be withheld from the prose narrator? The answer is already contained in the question: whatever is permitted the poet can prove nothing for one who is not a poet. In the concept itself of poet, and only in this, lies the ground of that freedom which is merely contemptible license as soon as it is not derived from the highest and noblest that constitutes him.

The laws of propriety are alien to innocent nature; only the experience of corruption has given them their origin. But as soon as that experience has been undergone and natural innocence has disappeared from morals, then they become sacred laws which a moral feeling may not contravene. They apply in any artificial world with the same right as the laws of nature rule in the world of innocence. But it is precisely this that denotes the poet: that he revokes everything in



himself that recalls an artificial world, that he is able to restore nature within himself to her original simplicity. But having done this, then he is by the same token exempted from all laws by which a corrupted heart is protected against itself. He is pure, he is innocent, and whatever is permitted to innocent nature is permitted him too; if you, who read or listen to him, are no longer guiltless, and if you cannot become so for the moment through his purifying presence, then it is *your* misfortune, not his; you are forsaking him, he has not sung for you.

The following, then, may be said with reference to liberties of this kind:

First: only *nature* can justify them. Hence they may not be the product of choice or of deliberate imitation; for we can never allow to a will that is always directed according to moral laws the privilege of sensuousness. (218) They must therefore be *naivety*. In order, however, to convince us that they are truly so, we must see them supported and accompanied by all else that is likewise grounded in nature, for nature can only be recognized by the rigorous consequence, unity, and uniformity of her effects. Only to a heart that despises all artificiality outright, and hence also even if it is useful, do we permit its exemption where it represses and limits; only to a heart that subordinates itself to all the shackles of nature do we permit that it make use of her freedom. All other feelings of such a person must in consequence bear the impress of naturalness; he must be true, simple, free, candid, full of feeling, upright; all deception, cunning, all caprice, all petty selfishness must be banished from his character, every trace of them from his work.



Second: only *beautiful* nature can justify liberties of this sort. Therefore they may not be onesided manifestations of appetite; for everything that originates in crude necessity is contemptible. From the totality and from the richness of human nature these sensuous energies must likewise derive. They must be *humanity*. But in order to be able to judge that the whole of human nature demands them and not merely a onesided and vulgar exigency of sensuousness, we must see that whole depicted of which they represent a single feature. In itself the sensuous mode of feeling is something innocent and indifferent. It displeases us in a human being only because it is animal and testifies to a lack of a more truly perfect humanity in him: it offends us in a work of art only because such a work makes a claim to please us and hence assumes that *we* are also capable of such a lack. But if we surprise in a person humanity functioning in all its remaining aspects, (219) if we find in the work in which liberties of this species have been exercised all the realities of mankind expressed, then that ground of our disapproval is removed and we can delight with unequivocal joy in the naive expression of true and beautiful nature. The same poet, therefore, who may allow himself to make us participants in such basely human feelings, must on the other hand be able to elevate all that is humanly great and beautiful and sublime.

This, then, would provide us with the criterion to which we could with certainty submit every poet who offends somewhat against propriety, and forces his freedom in the depiction of nature to this extreme. His work is vulgar and low, reprehensible without



exception, if it is *cold*, if it is *empty*, for this reveals its origin in intention and in vulgar exigency, and is a heinous assault on our appetites. On the other hand, it is beautiful, noble, and worthy of applause despite all the objections of frozen decency, if it is naive and binds spirit and heart together.\*

If I am told that, according to the criterion laid down here, most French narratives of this genre and their best imitations in Germany would not survive—that this would in part be the case with many a product of our most graceful and gifted poet, not even excepting his masterpieces—to this I have no reply. The dictum itself is anything but new, and I give here the grounds of (220) a judgment which has already long been enunciated by every finer feeling on this subject. But these very principles which perhaps appear all too rigorous in connection with those writings may perhaps be found too liberal in connection with some other works; for I do not deny that the same grounds on which I find entirely inexcusable the seductive pictures of the Roman and German Ovid, as well as of Crébillon, Voltaire, Marmontel (who calls himself a moral narrator), Laclos, and many others, yet reconcile me to the elegies of the Roman and German Propertius, even to some of the ill-reputed works of Diderot,<sup>32</sup> for the former are only

\* And *heart*: for the merely sensuous ardor of the portrayal and the luxuriant richness of imagination do not by far make it so. Thus *Ardinghello* remains, despite all its sensuous energy and all the fire of its coloration, only a sensuous caricature without truth and without aesthetic dignity. Still, this unusual production will always remain remarkable as an example of the almost poetic impetus which *mere appetite* was capable of supplying. [Translator's note: Wilhelm Heinse, *Ardinghello, or the Enchanting Islands* (1787) was a contemporary "hit."]



witty, only prosaic, only lascivious, while the latter are poetic, human, and naive.\*

### *Idyll*

(221) There remain a few more words for me to say about this third species of sentimental poetry, a few words only, because a more detailed development of them, which they surely require, is reserved for another occasion.\* 33

\* If I mention the immortal author of *Agathon*, *Oberon*, etc., in this company I must declare expressly that I do not mean to confuse him with them. His portrayals, even those most objectionable from this point of view, have no material tendency (as a recent, somewhat thoughtless, critic permitted himself to suggest not long ago); the author of *Love for Love* and of so many other naive and gifted works, in all of which the features of a beautiful and noble soul are unmistakable, could not possess such a tendency at all. But he seems to me to be pursued by the quite exceptional misfortune that portrayals of this kind are made necessary by the plan of his works. The cold understanding that designed that plan demanded them of him and his feeling seems to me so far removed from favoring them by preference that I believe I can still recognize that cold understanding in their execution. And this very coldness in depiction is damaging to them in judgment since only naive feeling can justify such portrayals aesthetically as well as morally. Whether the poet, however, is permitted in the designing of his plan to expose himself to such a danger in its execution, and whether a plan can be called poetic at all which, allowing the foregoing for the moment, cannot be executed without outraging the chaste feeling of the poet (221) as well as of the reader, and without forcing both to dwell on subjects from which refined feeling gladly retreats—this is what I doubt, and on which I would be glad to hear a reasonable opinion.

\* I must repeat once again that satire, elegy, and idyll, as they are here laid down as the only three possible species of sentimental poetry, have nothing in common with the three particular genres of poem which are known by these names, other than the *modes of perception* which are proper to the former as well as to the latter. But that, beyond the limits of naive poetry,



The poetic representation of innocent and contented mankind is the universal concept of this type of poetic composition. Since this innocence and this contentedness appear incompatible with the artificial conditions of society at large and with a certain degree of education and refinement, the poets have removed the location of idyll from the tumult of everyday life (223) into the simple pastoral state and assigned its period before the *beginnings of civilization* in the childlike age of man. But one can readily grasp that these designations are merely accidental, that they are not to be considered as the purpose of the idyll, simply as the most natural means to it. The purpose itself is invariably only to represent man in a state of inno-

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only this tripartite mode of perception and poetic composition is possible, consequently that the area of sentimental poetry is completely exhausted by this division, can be easily deduced from the concept of the latter.

Sentimental is distinguished from naive poetry, namely, in that it refers actual conditions, at which the latter halts, to ideas, and applies ideas to actuality. Hence it has always, as has already been observed above, to contend simultaneously with two conflicting objects, i.e., with the ideal and with experience, between which neither more nor less than just these three following relationships can be conceived of. Either it is the *contradiction* with actual conditions, or it is its *correspondence* with the ideal, which is the preferred attitude of mind, or it is divided between the two. In the first case it is satisfied by the force of the inner conflict, by *energetic movement*; in the second, it is satisfied by the *harmony* of the inner life, by *dynamic calm*; in the third, conflict *alternates* with harmony, calm alternates with motion. This triadic state of feeling gives rise to three different modes of poetry (222) to which the customary names, *satire*, *idyll*, *elegy*, correspond exactly, provided only that one recalls the mood into which the poetic species known by these names place the mind, and abstracted from the means by which they achieve it.

Anyone who could now still ask me to which of the three



cence, i.e., in a condition of harmony and of peace with himself and with his environment.

But such a condition does not occur only before the beginnings of civilization, rather it is also the condition which civilization, if it can be said to have any particular tendency everywhere, aims at as its ultimate purpose. Only the idea of this condition and belief in its possible realization can reconcile man to all the evils to which he is subjected in the course of civilization, and were it merely a chimera the complaints of those would be justified who deplore society at large and the cultivation of the understanding simply as an evil, and assume that superseded state of nature to be the true purpose of mankind.<sup>34</sup> For the individual

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species I assign the epic, the novel, the tragedy, etc., would not have understood me at all. For the concept of these last, as individual *genres of composition*, is either not at all or at least not solely determined by the mode of perception; it is clear, rather, that they can be executed in more than one mode of perception, consequently in more than one of the species of poetry I have established.

Finally, I have still to remark that if one is inclined to take sentimental poetry, as is reasonable, as a genuine order (and not simply as a degenerate species) and as an extension of true poetic art, then some attention must be paid to it in the determination of poetic types as well as generally in the whole of poetic legislation, which is still onesidedly based on the observances of the ancient and naive poets. The sentimental poet deviates too radically from the naive for those forms which the latter introduced to accommodate him at all times without strain. In such cases it is indeed difficult to distinguish correctly always the exceptions which the differentiation between the species demands, from the subterfuges to which incompetence resorts: but this much we learn from experience, that in the hands of sentimental poets (even the most outstanding) no single type of composition has ever remained entirely what it was among the ancients, and that often very new types have been executed under the old names.



who is immersed in civilization, infinitely much therefore depends upon his receiving a tangible assurance of the realization of that idea in the world of sense, of the possible reality of that condition, and since actual experience, far from nourishing this belief, rather contradicts it constantly, here, as in so many cases, the faculty of poetic composition comes to the aid of reason in order to render that idea palpable to intuition and to realize it in individual cases.

That innocence of the pastoral state is indeed also a poetic conception, and hence imagination must already there have shown itself to be creative; but, apart from the solution of the task having been incomparably simpler and easier, experience itself provided the individual features from which it had only to select and combine into (224) a whole. Beneath the unclouded skies, in the simple conditions of the primitive state, and with limited knowledge nature is easily satisfied, and man does not become savage until dire need has frightened him. All peoples who possess a history have a paradise, a state of innocence, a golden age; indeed, every man has his paradise, his golden age, which he recalls, according as he has more or less of the poetic in his nature, with more or less inspiration. Experience itself therefore supplies features enough for the depiction of which the pastoral idyll treats. For this reason it remains always a beautiful, an elevating fiction, and the poetic power in representing it has truly worked in behalf of the idea. For, to the man who has once deviated from the simplicity of nature and is delivered over to the dangerous guidance of his reason, it is of infinite importance to perceive once again nature's legislation in a pure exemplar, and in this faithful mirror to be able once again to purify



himself of the corruption of civilization. But in doing so, one circumstance is involved that very much reduces the aesthetic value of such poems. Set *before the beginnings of civilization*, they exclude together with its disadvantages all its advantages, and by their very nature they find themselves necessarily in conflict with it. *Theoretically*, then, they lead us backwards, while *practically* they lead us forwards and ennoble us. Unhappily they place that purpose *behind* us, *toward* which they should, however, lead us, and hence they imbue us only with a sad feeling of loss, not with joyous feelings of hope. Since they can only attain their purpose by the denial of all art, and only by the simplification of human nature, they possess together with the utmost value for the *heart*, all too little for the *spirit*, and their narrow range is too soon exhausted. Therefore we can love them and seek them out when we stand in need of peace, but not when our (225) forces are striving for motion and activity. Only for the sick in spirit can they provide *healing*, but no *nourishment* for the healthy; they cannot unify, only assuage. This shortcoming grounded in the essence of the pastoral idyll has been beyond the art of the poets to correct. This type of composition has not, indeed, been lacking in enthusiastic admirers, and there are readers enough who can prefer an *Amyntas* and a *Daphnis* <sup>35</sup> to the greatest masterpieces of the epic and dramatic muses; but with such readers it is not so much their taste as their private needs that judges of works of art; consequently their opinion cannot be considered here. The reader of spirit and perception does not, indeed, mistake the value of such poetry, but he feels himself more rarely drawn to it and sooner satiated. They function at the needful mo-



ment all the more powerfully; but the truly beautiful should not be obliged to wait for such a moment, but should rather produce it.

What I am here criticizing in the bucolic idyll applies of course only to the sentimental; for the naive can never be lacking content since here it is already contained in the form itself. All poetry must indeed possess an infinite content, only through this is it poetry; but it can fulfill the requirement in two different ways. It can be infinite in accordance with its form, if it presents its subject with *all its limits*, by individualizing it; it can be infinite according to its matter if it *removes all its limits* from the subject, by idealizing it; hence either by an absolute representation or by the representation of an absolute. The naive poet takes the first way, the sentimental the second. The first cannot fall short of his content so long as he remains faithful to nature which is always radically limited, i.e., infinite in relation to its form. To this, however, nature stands in opposition with her radical limitation, since he should place an absolute (226) content in the subject. The sentimental poet, therefore, does not well understand the advantages when he *borrowes his subjects* from the naive poet; in themselves they are completely indifferent and only become poetic by their treatment. In this way he imposes on himself a number of restrictions quite unnecessarily, without power being able to carry through the limitation completely, or to compete in absolute assurance of the representation; he should therefore rather remove himself in his subject from the naive poet, because he can only regain from him through the subject what the latter has to his advantage in the form.



In order to make the application from this to the bucolic idyll of the sentimental poets, it now becomes clear why these poems, despite every effort of genius and art, are not completely satisfactory either for the heart or for the spirit. They implement an ideal, and yet retain the narrower indigent pastoral world, whereas they should absolutely have chosen either another world for the ideal, or a different representation for the pastoral world. They are so far ideal that thereby the representation loses in individual truth, yet again they are so far individual that the ideal content suffers thereby. One of Gessner's shepherds, for example, cannot delight us as nature by the fidelity of imitation, since for this he is too ideal a being; he can as little satisfy us as an ideal by infinitude of thought since for this he is much too inadequate a creature. He will, indeed, satisfy all classes of readers without exception up to a certain point because he strives to unite the naive with the sentimental, and consequently discharges to a certain degree the two opposed demands that can be made on a poem; but because the poet, in the effort to unify both, fails to do justice to either one, and is neither wholly nature (227) nor wholly ideal, he cannot for that very reason be quite acceptable to a rigorous taste that cannot forgive half-measures in aesthetic matters. It is extraordinary that this half-way state extends likewise to the language of the poet we have mentioned; he wavers undecided between poetry and prose, as though the poet were fearful of removing himself in metrical address too far from actual nature, and in nonmetrical address of losing his poetic impulse. A loftier satisfaction is aroused by Milton's superb representation of the first human couple and the state of



innocence in paradise: the most beautiful idyll known to me of the sentimental type. Here nature is noble, spirited, at once full of range and depth, the highest meaning of humanity clothed in the most graceful form.

Hence here too, in the idyll, as in all other poetic types, one must make a choice once and for all between individuality and ideality; for to seek to satisfy both demands simultaneously is, so long as one has not reached the acme of perfection, the surest way of falling short of both. Should the modern feel within himself sufficient of the Greek spirit to compete, despite all the intractability of his material, with the Greek on his own ground, namely in the field of naive poetry, then let him do it wholly and exclusively, and liberate himself from every demand of the sentimental taste of the age. He may indeed reach his model with difficulty; between the original and the most successful epigone a perceptible interval will always remain open, but by these means he is nevertheless certain to produce a genuinely poetic work.\* If he is driven (228) on the contrary, to the ideal by the sentimental poetic impulse, then let him pursue this wholly, in complete purity, and not rest content until he has reached the highest, without looking back to see whether actuality has borne him out. Let him despise

\* Herr Voss has recently not only enriched our German literature with such a work, his *Luise*, but has also truly extended it. This idyll, if not completely free of sentimental influences, does belong wholly to the naive genre, and vies with rare success by its individual truth and unalloyed nature with the best Greek models. It cannot therefore (and this accrues (228) much to its credit) be compared with any modern poem, but must be compared with Greek models, with which it also shares the exceedingly rare advantage of according us a pure, certain, and always unmixed pleasure.



the unworthy evasion of cheapening the meaning of the ideal in order to accommodate it to human inadequacy, or of excluding the spirit in order to make readier way with the heart. Let him not lead us backwards into our childhood in order to secure to us with the most precious acquisitions of the understanding a peace which cannot last longer than the slumber of our spiritual faculties, but rather lead us forward into our maturity in order to permit us to perceive that higher harmony which rewards the combatant and gratifies the conqueror. Let him undertake the task of idyll so as to display that pastoral innocence even in creatures of civilization and under all the conditions of the most active and vigorous life, of expansive thought, of the subtlest art, the highest social refinement, which, in a word, leads man who cannot now go back to Arcady forward to Elysium.

The concept of this idyll is the concept of a conflict fully reconciled not only in the individual, but in society, of a free uniting of inclination with the law, of a nature illuminated by the highest moral dignity, briefly, none other than the ideal of beauty applied to actual life. Its character thus subsists in the complete reconciliation of *all opposition between actuality and the ideal* which has supplied material for satirical and elegiac poetry, and therewith (229) all conflict in the feelings likewise. Calm would then be the predominant impression of such a poetic type, but calm of perfection, not of inertia; a calm that derives from the balance not the arresting of those powers that spring from richness and not emptiness, and is accompanied by the feeling of an infinite capacity. But for the very reason that all resistance vanishes it will then be incomparably more difficult than in the two former



types of poetry to represent *motion*, without which, however, no poetic effect whatsoever can be conceived. The highest unity must prevail; but not at the expense of variety; the mind must be satisfied, but not so that aspiration ceases on that account. The resolution of this question is in fact what the theory of the idyll has to supply.

[CONCLUSION OF THE TREATISE ON  
NAIVE AND SENTIMENTAL POETRY TO-  
GETHER WITH SOME OBSERVATIONS  
CONCERNING A CHARACTERISTIC DIF-  
ERENCE AMONG MEN (*Die Horen*, No. 1,  
1796)]

The following has been established on the relation of both modes of poetry to one another and to the poetic ideal:

To the naive poet nature has granted the favor of functioning always as an undivided unity, to be at every instant an independent and complete whole, and to represent mankind, in all its significance, in actuality. Upon the sentimental poet she has conferred the power, or rather impressed a lively impulse, to restore out of himself that unity that has been disrupted by abstraction, to complete the humanity within himself, and from a limited condition to pass over into an infinite one.\* (230) But to give human nature its full

\* For the reader whose scrutiny is critical I add that both modes of perception considered in their ultimate concepts are related to one another like the first and third categories, in that the last always arises by the combination of the first with its exact opposite. The opposite of naive perception is, namely,



actual existence what the latter can only arouse a lively impulse to attain, the latter for his part possesses the great advantage over the first that he can give the impulse a *greater object* (231) than the former has supplied or could supply. All actuality, we know, falls short of the ideal; everything existing has its limits, but thought is boundless. From this limitation to which everything sensuous is subjected, the naive poet therefore also suffers, whereas the unconditional freedom of the faculty of ideas accrues to the sentimental. The former therefore indeed fulfills his task, but the task itself is something limited; the latter indeed does not fulfill his, but his task is an infinite one. In this, too, everyone can learn from his own experience. From the naive poet one turns with facility and eagerness to the active environment; the sentimental will always for a few moments disaffect one for actual life. This is because our minds are here extended by the infinitude of the idea beyond their natural circumscription, so that nothing to hand can any longer be adequate to it. We fall back rather, lost in our thoughts, where we find nourishment for the impulse generated in the world of ideas instead of seeking outside ourselves, as with the former, for sensuous objects. Sentimental poetry is the offspring of retreat and quietude, and to them, too, it invites us; the naive is the child of life, and to life also it leads us back.

I have called naive poetry a *favor of nature* to underscore that reflection has no part in it. It is a lucky throw of the dice, standing in no need of improvement if successful, but equally incapable of any if it should fail. In his feeling the whole work of the naive genius is acquitted; here is his strength and his limit. If he has not at once *felt* poetically, i.e., not at once com-



pletely humanly, then this shortcoming can no longer be repaired by art. Criticism can only afford him an insight into his mistake, but it cannot supply any beauty in its place. By his nature the naive genius must do everything; by his freedom he can achieve (232) little; and it will fulfill its essence so long as nature in him should operate according to an inner necessity. Now everything indeed is necessary that takes place by nature: this applies equally to every product of the naive genius (from whom nothing is farther removed than arbitrary action) be it never so successful; but the coercion of the moment is one thing, the inner necessity of the whole quite another. Considered as a whole, nature is independent and infinite; in any individual manifestation, however, she is dependent and limited. This, therefore, applies also to the nature of the poet. Even the most felicitous moment in which he can find himself is dependent upon a preceding one; hence, too, only a conditional necessity can be attributed to him. But now the poet is assigned the task of equating an individual state to the human whole, consequently to base that state absolutely and necessarily upon himself. Hence, every trace of temporal dependence must be removed from the moment of inspiration, and the subject itself, however limited it may be, may not limit the poet. It will be readily understood that this is possible only insofar as the poet brings to the subject absolute freedom and breadth of ability and as he is practised in embracing everything with his whole humanity. His practice, however, he can receive only from the world in which he lives and by which he is directly affected. The naive genius is thus dependent upon experience in a way unknown to the sentimental. The latter, we know,



only begins his function where the former concludes his; his strength subsists in completing an inadequate subject *out of himself* and by his own power to transform a limited condition into a condition of freedom. Thus the naive poetic genius requires assistance from without, whereas the sentimental nourishes and purifies himself from within; around him he must observe nature instinct with form, a poetic world, naive humanity, since it must (233) complete its work in sense perception. If, however, this assistance from without is not forthcoming, he finds himself surrounded by a spiritless matter, and only two things then occur. Either he abandons his species if the genus predominates in him, and he becomes sentimental if only to remain poetic; or, if the characteristics of the species retain their predominance, he abandons his genus and becomes common nature if only to remain nature. The first may well be the case with the finest sentimental poets in the ancient Roman world and in more modern times. Had they been born in another age, transplanted beneath other skies, they, who now move us by ideas, would have enchanted us by individual truth and naive beauty. From the second the poet could only with difficulty protect himself if he cannot abandon nature in a vulgar world.

*Actual* nature, of course; but from this one cannot carefully enough distinguish *true* nature which is the *subject* of naive poetry. Actual nature exists everywhere, but true nature is all the rarer, for to it belongs an inner necessity of existence. Actual nature is every outburst of passion, however crude; it may even be true nature, but truly *human* it cannot be, for this requires some participation of the independent faculties in every utterance the expression of which is to possess dignity. Actual human nature includes every moral



baseness, but it is to be hoped that true human nature does not; for the latter cannot be other than noble. The absurdities cannot be overlooked to which this confusion between actual and true human nature has misled criticism as well as practice: what trivialities have been permitted, even praised, in poetry because, alas! they are actual nature; how pleased one is to find caricatures which are ghastly enough in the actual world carefully transported into the poetic and counterfeited true to life. Certainly, (234) the poet may imitate bad nature also, and indeed the very notion of satire involves this: but in this case his own beautiful nature must be conveyed with the subject, but the vulgar material must not drag the imitator down with it. If only he himself is true human nature at least in the moment of execution then it does not matter at all what he executes: but equally we can only accept a true picture of actuality from the hands of such a poet. Woe unto us readers, if the grotesque mirrors itself in the grotesque, if the scourge of satire falls into the hands of one whom nature intended should wield a much more serious lash, if men who, devoid of everything that one can call poetic spirit, possess only the apish talent of vulgar imitation and exercise it in a gruesome and frightful manner at the expense of our taste!

But even for the truly naive poet, I have noted, common nature can become dangerous; for in the final analysis that fine accord between feeling and thinking in which his character subsists, is still only an idea that is never entirely attained in actuality; and even in the most fortunate geniuses of this class, passive receptivity is always more or less dependent upon external impression and only a continuous agility of the productive faculties, which is not to be expected of human



nature, would be able to prevent the material from exercising upon occasion its blind power over receptivity. Whenever this is the case, poetic feeling turns into the vulgar.\*

\* How very much the naive poet is dependent upon his subject and how much, even everything, depends upon his feelings, the ancient poetic art can supply us with the best examples. To the extent that nature within and without them is beautiful, the poetry of the ancients is likewise so; but if, on the contrary, nature is vulgar, then the spirit has (235) fled from their poetry. Every reader of finer feeling must sense, for example, in their depictions of feminine nature, of the relation between the two sexes and of love in particular, a certain emptiness and satiety that all the truth and naivety of the representation cannot overcome. Without speaking of fanatical enthusiasm which, of course, does not ennoble nature but detracts from it, one may, it is to be hoped, assume that in reference to that relationship of the sexes and the passion of love nature is capable of a nobler character than the ancients gave it; we know too of the *incidental* circumstances which for them stood as an obstacle to the refinement of those feelings. That it was narrowness, not inner necessity, that kept the ancients at a lower level is shown by the example of the modern poets who have gone so much further than their predecessors, still without exceeding the bounds of nature. Here we are not speaking of that which sentimental poets have made of this subject, for they do go beyond nature into the ideal, and, therefore, their example cannot be applied against the ancients; but we are speaking of the manner in which this subject has been treated by truly naive poets as, for example, in the *Sakuntala*, by the minnesingers in many a courtly tale and knightly epic, or by Shakespeare, Fielding, and many others, even by German poets. This would then have provided the occasion for the ancients to spiritualize from within themselves a theme which externally was too crude to supply the poetic meaning, which was lacking in external perception, by means of reflection, to supplement nature by the idea; in a word, to make a limited object into an infinite one by a sentimental operation. But these were naive, not sentimental, poetic geniuses; their work was, therefore, terminated with the external perception. [Translator's note: *Sakuntala*: a Sanskrit drama of the first century B.C. by Kalidasa, known to Schiller in the translation by Johann Forster (1791).]



(235) No genius of the naive category, from Homer down to Bodmer,<sup>36</sup> has entirely avoided these reefs; but of course they are most dangerous to those who are obliged to defend themselves externally from vulgar nature, or whose inner cultivation is destroyed by a lack of discipline. The first is responsible for the fact that even cultivated writers do not (236) always remain free of platitudes, and the second that many a fine talent is prevented from occupying the rank to which nature has called it. The comic poet, whose genius most of all is nourished by actual life, is for that very reason most exposed to platitude, as indeed the examples of Aristophanes and Plautus and of almost all the later poets show who have followed in their footsteps. How long does even the sublime Shakespeare let us sink sometimes; with what trivialities are we not tormented by Lope de Vega, Molière, Regnard, Goldoni; into what mire are we not dragged down by Holberg? Schlegel, one of the most gifted poets of our fatherland, whose genius could not but shine among the foremost in this category; Gellert, a truly naive poet, as also Rabener, even Lessing, the cultivated student of criticism and a so watchful judge of his own work—do they not all, more or less, pay for the insipid character of the nature they have selected as the material of their satire? I do not mention any of the most recent writers of this class since there are none that I can except.<sup>37</sup>

And not enough that the naive poetic spirit is in danger of nourishing itself all too much with common reality—by the facility with which it expresses itself, and precisely by means of this greater assimilation to actual life it encourages the vulgar imitator to try his hand in the realm of poetry. Sentimental poetry, albeit



dangerous enough from another point of view, as I shall later show, at least keeps *these* folk at a distance, because it is not everyone's forte to elevate himself to the idea; but naive poetry bears within itself the belief that it is mere feeling, mere humor, mere imitation of actual nature that makes for the poet. But nothing is more repellent than the banal individual who takes it into his head to be ingratiating and naive—he who should envelop himself in all the veils of art in order to conceal his (237) loathsome nature. From this source, too, come the unspeakable platitudes which Germans love to hear in the form of naive and comic songs and with which they are wont to amuse themselves incessantly at a well-laden table. Granted the license of whimsy, of feeling, these paltry things are tolerated—but this whimsy and this feeling cannot be too carefully suppressed. The muses on the Pleisse constitute a specially pitiful chorus in this respect, and they are answered in no better accords by the Thalias of the Leine and Elbe.\*<sup>38</sup> These jokes are as insipid as the passion is pitiful that is heard upon our tragic stages and that, instead of imitating true nature, achieves

\* These gentle friends have received very unkindly what a reviewer in the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* criticized a few years ago in Bürger's poems, and the spite with which they lick at this thorn seems to be an acknowledgment that with the cause of this poet they believe that they are contesting their own. But in this they are much in error. That censure could only apply to a true poetic genius, richly endowed by nature, but who had failed by his own education to cultivate that rare gift. Such an individual ought to and must be subjected to the highest criteria of art, because he possesses the power, if only he seriously intended to be equal to it; but it would be at once ridiculous and cruel to proceed in like manner with people whom nature has not favored, and who in every work they place upon the market display a completely convincing (238) certificate of indigence.



only the spiritless and ignoble expression of the actual, so that after such a tearful dish we are in the same mood as if we had just paid a visit to a hospital or read Salzmann's *Human Misery*.<sup>39</sup> Matters are still worse with satiric poetry and particularly with the comic novel which simply by its nature is so close to common life and hence ought, like any frontier post, to be in the safest hands. That man is truly least called to be (238) the *portrayer* of his times who is its *creature* and its *caricature*; but because it is so easy to conjure up some kind of comic character from one's own acquaintance, even if only *a fat man*,<sup>40</sup> and to get the grotesque down on paper with a crude pen, even the sworn enemies of everything in the poetic spirit sometimes feel the urge to flounder in this style and delight a circle of worthy friends with the fair offspring. A purely attuned feeling would, of course, never be in danger of confusing these products of a vulgar nature with the gifted fruits of naive genius; but it is precisely this mode of pure feeling that is lacking, and in most cases the attempt is made only to gratify a desire without making any demands on the spirit. The so patently misunderstood notion, true enough in itself, that one finds *recreation* in works of *bel esprit*, contributes substantially to this indulgence, if one can indeed call it indulgence when nothing loftier is intimated and the reader profits by it in the same manner as the author. Common nature, in fact, when it is under tension, can only recuperate in emptiness, and even a higher degree of understanding, if it is not supported by an equivalent cultivation of feeling, relaxes from its affairs only in insipid sensual enjoyment.

If the poetic genius must elevate itself by its free individual activity above all *accidental* limits that are



inseparable from any *determined* condition in order to attain to human nature in its absolute capacity, it may not, on the other hand, go beyond the *necessary* limits which are involved in the concept of human nature; for the absolute (but only within humanity) is its task and its sphere. We have seen that the naive genius is not in fact in danger of surpassing this sphere, nor likewise (239) of *exhausting it fully*, if it sets external necessity or the accidental exigency of the moment too much in the place of inner necessity. The sentimental genius, however, is exposed to the danger, due to the effort of removing all limitations from it, of suppressing human nature altogether, and not only, as it may and should, elevating or *idealizing* it above and beyond all determined and limited actuality to absolute possibility, but rather of going still further beyond possibility or otherwise falling into extravagant *enthusiasm*. This error of *overtension* is as much founded in a specific idiosyncrasy of its procedure as the opposed idea of *indolence* is the idiosyncratic approach of the naive. For the naive genius permits nature to reign unrestrictedly within himself, and since nature in its individual temporal manifestations is always dependent and scanty, naive feeling will not always remain sufficiently *exalted* to be able to resist the accidental determination of the moment. On the other hand, the sentimental genius abandons actuality in order to rise upward to ideas and to command his material with free spontaneity; but since reason, in accordance with its laws, always strives toward the unconditioned, the sentimental genius will not always remain sufficiently *dispassionate* to maintain himself uninterruptedly and uniformly within the conditions that are entailed in the concept of human nature and to which reason, even in



its freest effects, must here always remain bound. This could take place only through a relative degree of receptivity which, however, in the sentimental spirit, is as far outweighed by spontaneity as in the naive it outweighs spontaneity. If one therefore sometimes misses the spirit in the creations of naive genius, one will frequently seek in vain in the products of the sentimental for the matter. Both, therefore, albeit in entirely opposed (240) ways, fall into the error of *emptiness*; for matter without spirit, and a play of spirit without matter, are both a cipher in the aesthetic judgment.

All poets who draw their material too onesidedly from the world of thought and are driven more by an inner wealth of ideas than by stress of feeling to the poetic image are more or less in danger of falling into this bypath. In its creations reason draws too little upon this counsel of the limits of the sensuous world, and thought is always driven farther than experience can follow. If, however, it is driven so far that not only could no particular experience correspond to it (for thus far the ideally beautiful may and must go), but rather that it in fact contravenes the conditions of all possible experience and consequently, in order to make it actual, human nature would have to be totally and completely abandoned, then such a thought is no longer poetic but overstrained—provided, however, that it has declared itself as representable and poetic; for if it does not possess this it would still suffice if it only does not contradict itself. If it does contradict itself it is no longer overstrain, but *nonsense*; for that which does not exist at all can likewise not exceed its boundaries. If, however, it should not declare itself as an object for the imagination then, too, it is not overstrained; for mere thought is boundless, and whatever



has no limits cannot surpass any. Hence only that can be called overstrained that outrages, not indeed logical, but sensuous truth, while still making claims upon it. If, then, a poet has the unhappy inspiration of choosing as a theme for depiction natures that are simply *superhuman* and which also *may* not be represented otherwise, he cannot save himself from being overstrained by abandoning the poetic and by not even undertaking to allow his subject to be executed by the imagination. For if he were to do this, (241) either it would carry over its own limits to the subject, and make of an absolute object a limited *human* one (as, for example, all the Greek gods are, and rightly so), or the subject would remove the limits set to imagination, i.e., it would suppress them, and in this precisely the overstrain subsists.

Overstrain in feeling must be distinguished from overstrain in representation; we are speaking here only of the first. The object in perception can be unnatural, but in itself is nature, and hence must speak in her own behalf. If, therefore, overstrain in feeling can flow out of warmheartedness and a truly poetic disposition, then overstrain in representation testifies always to a cold heart, and very often to poetic incapacity. It is therefore not a mistake against which the sentimental poetic genius might have to be warned, but which threatens only his uninspired imitator, especially since he does not disdain the company of the banal, insipid, and even base. Overstrained feeling is by no means without truth, and as actual feeling it must also necessarily possess a real object. Because it is nature it also admits of simple expression and, coming from the heart, it cannot fail to reach the heart. Since its subject is not drawn from nature but is onesidedly and artifi-



cially advanced by the understanding, it possesses a too merely logical reality, and the feeling is therefore not purely human. It is not an illusion that Héloïse feels for Abélard, Petrarch for his Laura, St. Preux for his Julie, Werther for his Lotte, and what Agathon, Phantias, Peregrinus Proteus (Wieland's, I mean) feel for their ideals.<sup>41</sup> The feeling is true, but its object is artificial and lies outside human nature. If their feeling had simply remained attached to the sensuous truth of its objects it would (242) not have been able to assume that impetus; on the other hand a merely capricious play of fantasy without any inner meaning would likewise not have been able to touch our hearts, for the heart is touched only by reason. This overstrain, then, merits correction, not contempt, and whoever mocks at it should ask himself whether he is not perhaps so clever out of heartlessness, or so cautious out of lack of reason. Thus the exaggerated tenderness in matters of gallantry and honor that characterizes the knightly romances, particularly the Spanish, the scrupulous delicacy driven to the point of preciousness in the French and English sentimental novels (of the best kind) are not only subjectively true, but also, objectively considered, not without substance; they are genuine feelings actually derived from a moral source and are only objectionable because they surpass the bounds of human truth. Without that moral reality how would it be possible that they could be communicated with such power and fervor as we nonetheless find them in experience to be? The same applies also to moral and religious enthusiasm and to exalted love of freedom and fatherland. Since the objects of these feelings are always ideas and do not appear in external experience (for what affects the political enthusiast, for example,



### *NAIVE AND SENTIMENTAL POETRY*

- 1 This distinction will become important later: it points to a subjective or typological difference in what nature is taken to be rather than some uniform notion of what nature *is*.



- 2 This should not be taken as an appeal, like Rousseau's, to mindless happiness. Later in the essay Schiller makes clear that there is no going back to a Golden Age which never existed, but forward to the fulfilment of an ideal.
- 3 Sterne's work (1768) was available in German translation and had inspired a good deal of self-conscious imitation; e.g., Moritz August von Thümmel, *Reise in die mittäglichen Provinzen von Frankreich im Jahr 1785-6*.
- 4 "Determination" (*Bestimmung*) and "determinacy" (*Bestimmbarkeit*) refer respectively to the extent to which maturity has resulted in an actualization of possibilities, and to the range of those possibilities as potentialities that may still be realized. Cf. *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, Letters 19 and 21.
- 5 The terms added by Schiller in parentheses should be understood in their Kantian sense: "theoretical" refers to cognition, "practical" to morality.
- 6 *Affekt*: the term is still used in modern psychology, where it retains the meaning intended here: spontaneous feeling or reaction.
- 7 In the second of these three examples illustrating naivety of temperament, Schiller shows the peculiar vulnerability of the good man in a wicked world. This is a recurrent theme with him, as seen in the contrast between Karl and Franz Moor, Don Carlos and Philip, Wallenstein and Octavio.
- 8 The life of Hadrian VI (Pope, 1522-23) was known to Schiller from J.M. Schröckh's *Allgemeine Biographie*, 1767-78. The whole passage shows Schiller's expository style as an historian at its best.
- 9 This passage bears on the quarrel with Fichte, whom Schiller accused in a letter of June 1795 of tediousness and excessive abstraction in graceless philosophical language. Echoes of this dispute, which helped to disenchant Schiller with philosophy, are also found in another essay of this period, *Ueber die notwendigen Grenzen beim Gebrauch schöner Formen*, XII, 121 ff.
- 10 This paradox fascinated Schiller; he returns to it in No. 41 of the *Votivtafeln*:  
Warum kann der lebendige Geist dem Geist nicht erscheinen?



*Spricht* die Seele, so spricht, ach! schon *die Seele* nicht mehr.

Why cannot living spirit appear to mind?

If the soul *speaks*, then, alas! it is not *the soul* that speaks. (I, 149)

- 11 I.e., freedom of the will.
- 12 Compare the language of these oblique allusions to the as yet unnamed Goethe with the letter to Körner of February 2, 1789 quoted in the Introduction.
- 13 The reference is probably to Gottsched, Lessing's old enemy, who had recommended a singularly pedantic French style as a model for German dramatists to imitate. In a letter to Goethe, Schiller admits organizing "a little rabbit hunt against the critics" in this essay, in part to pay them back for their criticisms of him.
- 14 This characterization of Ariosto as a sentimental poet is no doubt more accurate than his inclusion among naive geniuses a few pages ago; but even Homer nods!
- 15 Cf. Schiller's review of Goethe's *Iphigenia* (XVI 196, 5).
- 16 Cf. *Aesthetic Education*, 24th Letter (XII 92, 17), where this distinction is elaborated.
- 17 In a letter of December 18, 1795, Wilhelm von Humboldt asked Schiller for this disquisition and was referred to the *Aesthetic Letters*. From the context it would seem that the 17th Letter is meant, especially the passage (XII 64, 5) in which he talks of the ideal of humanity and the ideal of beauty being simultaneously given.
- 18 This argument is expanded in the last section of the essay in the treatment of didacticism and hedonism as the "purpose" of art (cf. XII 243, 38). There, however, these two extremes are more closely associated with the naive and sentimental, and not, as here, with the two kinds of satire.
- 19 Schiller points to a question as applicable to the theater of our day as it was of his: whether the dramatist's work reflects a legitimate, if passionately pessimistic, view of human nature; or merely the disarray of his own personality?
- 20 Albrecht von Haller (1708-77), professor of physiology in Göttingen; his ideas are apparent in Schiller's thesis for the medical doctorate. Haller was also a well known poet in his day; elsewhere Schiller quotes his satiric poem *On the Origin of Evil*.



- 21 This expression (*Tugend des Temperaments*) does not occur in Schiller's writings outside this paragraph. What he means by it, I think, is the sort of virtue displayed in the absence of temptation, but on which the individual preens himself if anyone should notice.
- 22 Lucian (c. 125-180), the brilliant Greek satirist, quoted by Schiller in his friend Wieland's translation.
- 23 "Yorick" is Lawrence Sterne.
- 24 Ewald von Kleist (1715-59) was a lyricist and also the author of patriotic poetry; he was killed in battle.
- 25 James Thomson, whose *Seasons* were enormously popular in Germany in a translation by Barthold Heinrich Brockes.
- 25<sup>a</sup> Edward Young (1683-1765), English poet, author of a series of elegies, *Night Thoughts* (1742-5) which contributed considerable impetus to the Romantic movement in Germany and France.
- 26 Klopstock, who by now is almost unreadable, is not really worthy of most of this criticism. It should instead be taken as an elaboration of Schiller's difficulties with the "musical" mood. As it applies to Klopstock, what is meant is extreme woolliness of thought and what Melville called "de-testable allegory."
- 26<sup>a</sup> Harp, lyre, lute: symbols of epic, lyric, and elegiac poetry respectively.
- 27 Johann Peter Uz (1720-96) and Georg Jacobi (1740-1814) were "Anacreontics"; Michael Denis (1729-1800) and Heinrich Wilhelm Gerstenberg (1737-1823) were members of the "bardic" movement, the latter is famous for his early Storm and Stress tragedy *Ugolino*; Salomon Gessner (1730-87); Ludwig Hölty (1748-76); Leopold Friedrich Göckingk (1748-1828).
- 28 *Wilhelm Meister*.
- 29 This refers to the Fragment of 1790, which was all that was published of *Faust* so far.
- 30 I.e., 1777, the date of Johann Martin Miller's *Siegwart, Eine Klostersgeschichte*, referred to in the next paragraph.
- 31 Cf. note 3.
- 32 "German Ovid": Johann Kaspar Friedrich Manso, cf. *Xenien* 28-33; Crébillon: probably the son (1707-77) is



intended—he emerged from jail for writing immoral novels to become Royal Censor; Jean-François Marmontel (1728-99), secretary of the Académie; Choderlos de Laclos (1741-1803), author of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*. These represent the debit side of this attempt to balance the autonomy of art against obscenity. On the credit side is the “German Propertius,” Goethe, whose *Roman Elegies* offended the straitlaced and, in the note below, Wieland.

- 33 This “more detailed exposition” was never written. Cf. the letter to Wilhelm von Humboldt of November 29, 1795.
- 34 Rousseau is, of course, intended. Cf. note 6 of the Introduction.
- 35 Two idylls by Gessner; possibly *Amyntas* refers to a pastoral poem by Tasso that had been translated into German a year before this essay.
- 36 Johann Jakob Bodmer (1698-1783) produced Old Testament epics in weak imitation of Klopstock’s *Messiah*.
- 37 Ludvig Holberg (1684-1754), founder of the Danish National Theater; Johann Elias Schlegel (1718-49), uncle of the brothers Wilhelm and Friedrich; Johann Gellert (1715-69), novelist and author of popular comedies; Gottlieb Wilhelm Rabener (1747-71), a satirist.
- 38 The three rivers are an oblique reference to the places of publication of the Leipzig, Göttingen, and the Vossische Almanacks, rivals of Schiller’s journal. In the note, the anonymous reviewer of Bürger’s poems was Schiller himself (cf. XVI 229 ff.)
- 39 Christian Salzmann produced this in 1784-88.
- 40 An allusion to Friedrich Nicolai’s *Story of a Fat Man* (1784). Nicolai was a popular hack, and a frequent victim of Schiller and Goethe in the *Xenien*.
- 41 St. Preux: the hero of Rousseau’s *La nouvelle Héloïse*; the last three are mentioned in Wieland’s *Musarion*.
- 42 The Muses of Comedy and Tragedy respectively.